

ANNE BOLEYN



The story of the devilish beauty who staked
all and lost in the days when a woman's virtue
was not much one way or another in the great
game of kings and kingdoms.

By **E. BARRINGTON**

*** A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook ***

This eBook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the eBook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the eBook. If either of these conditions applies, please contact a <https://www.fadedpage.com> administrator before proceeding. Thousands more FREE eBooks are available at <https://www.fadedpage.com>.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. IF THE BOOK IS UNDER COPYRIGHT IN YOUR COUNTRY, DO NOT DOWNLOAD OR REDISTRIBUTE THIS FILE.

Title: Anne Boleyn

Date of first publication: 1932

Author: Elizabeth Louisa Moresby (as E. Barrington) (1865-1931)

Date first posted: Aug. 28, 2020

Date last updated: Aug. 28, 2020

Faded Page eBook #20200845

This eBook was produced by: Al Haines, Cindy Beyer & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpcanada.net>

BOOKS BY

E. BARRINGTON

(L. Adams Beck)

Anne Boleyn

The Irish Beauties

The Duel of the Queens

The Laughing Queen

The Divine Lady

Glorious Apollo

Exquisite Perdita

The Ladies

The Gallants

The Chaste Diana

The Thunderer

The Empress of Hearts



ANNE BOLEYN

By E. BARRINGTON
(*L. Adams Beck*)



Garden City New York
DOUBLEDAY, DORAN & COMPANY, INC.

1934

PRINTED AT THE *Country Life Press*, GARDEN CITY, N. Y., U. S. A.

COPYRIGHT, 1932
BY HARRY DRAKE HODGKINSON
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

THIS STORY *is as true to history as the consultation of many authorities can make it. The letters and poems are all authentic though modernized in spelling and condensed at need.*

Contents

PART 1

Chapter I.....	<u>3</u>
Chapter II.....	<u>21</u>
Chapter III.....	<u>37</u>
Chapter IV.....	<u>53</u>
Chapter V.....	<u>68</u>
Chapter VI.....	<u>75</u>

PART 2

Chapter VII.....	<u>97</u>
Chapter VIII.....	<u>117</u>
Chapter IX.....	<u>135</u>
Chapter X.....	<u>150</u>
Chapter XI.....	<u>166</u>
Chapter XII.....	<u>182</u>

PART 3

Chapter XIII.....	<u>199</u>
Chapter XIV.....	<u>218</u>
Chapter XV.....	<u>237</u>
Chapter XVI.....	<u>251</u>
Chapter XVII.....	<u>263</u>
Chapter XVIII.....	<u>278</u>

PART 4

Chapter XIX.....	<u>297</u>
Chapter XX.....	<u>314</u>
Chapter XXI.....	<u>330</u>
Chapter XXII.....	<u>346</u>
Chapter XXIII.....	<u>361</u>
Chapter XXIV.....	<u>380</u>

Part One

Chapter One

“IF our father had not given you a Frenchwoman about you it would have been better for you and for us all,” tossed the young girl to the elder. “You are as arrant a coquette as walks on ten toes, and what you and she have been after at the French Court God knows! If she could further you in any devilry she would! Why, now you have come back packed with French airs and graces you cannot so much as pass a gardener lad without your eyes asking ‘What would you give to kiss me?’—And you mock at *me*?”

“Each to his own trade, sister, but for my part I don’t admire your motto ‘All for love and the world well lost.’ Maybe it’s safer to have a gardener lad casting sheep’s eyes than allow a king to make you a laughing-stock. Simonette has taught me better than that—all said and done! And I had a lesson or two at the French Court. After all, our father was Ambassador there and the Frenchmen thought me worth teaching.”

They sat on the mossy bole of a fallen elm in the great park at Hever Castle, and the ripe warmth of the late Kentish spring was abroad in the land, and above them feathered and waved the glorious elms and beeches glittering in May sunshine. But the sisters did not smile to it. You must feel them to be quick-eyed and tongued brunettes—their tempers flashing, but in Anne all was quickest, though she hid it when she pleased, as Mary could not. They had had constant angers since Anne came home a month ago from her maid-of-honourship at the French Court to find Mary at Hever sent down in disgrace from the English Court and the whole family in a perplexity of shame and anger over the girl. Certainly Anne was not one to hold her own tongue out of any foolish sympathy in such a case, and she had tongue-lashed Mary with adroit ironies and little sardonic laughers to which the other could never retort, try as she would.

Now Mary Boleyn sprang up and glared at her—she could be bold with a woman though even then only on the edge of a desperate sally of tears, and Anne, who knew her weakness to the bone, sat fanning her glowing cheeks languidly with a great horse-chestnut leaf and measuring the girl with a look

of measureless contempt. Mary made a swift slant to strike her on the cheek but her heart failed her.

“No, insolent French monkey!” she cried, quivering. “You shall not lower me to that. If the King did make love to me I did not yield.—Reason good, I should have been starrng it at Court and not shut up here, if I had, with a minx like you.”

Anne fanned on.

“You did not yield? Indeed? Then why did the poor good Queen send for you and tell you her mind about your behaviour with the King’s Grace? If _____”

“She never did!” cried Mary Boleyn, scarlet as an autumn berry, and still the taunting green fan waved on.

“If she never did rumour is a liar and—why add lies to—— I won’t say what!”

Now she sprang to her feet and faced the cowering Mary. Words poured from her like the song from the thrush on the may-tree but not so kindly:

“The Queen sent for you and told you that you were shameless. She spoke of the day Lady Mountjoy her friend caught you with him in the garden-house at Greenwich, and she was as white and stern as the saints she worships from morning till night. And she said you were banished the Court and the King’s Grace did not wag a finger to save his lady-love. I declare I could forgive him that if he had chosen any but a green gosling like you! And then you must confess and be sorry, and here you sit at Hever twiddling your thumbs and simpering and crying over your lost virtue like a village girl after the fair. Didn’t men pester me in France—offer after offer!—and did I listen? I knew better. I say a girl that goes so far with a man—king or knave—and comes back with nothing to show for it is a simpleton and a disgrace and a fool!”

She plumped down on the tree again after her oration and tossed the leaf away as if she hated it. She looked as if for two pins she would have clawed Mary—Mary who was as pale now for fury as she had been red.

“And what should I have to show for it? Wages for my kisses—not I! That’s you! That’s Simonette! You that have come home from France with your mails [trunks] full of love-letters and verses and gifts from men. Wages? When I love a man I kiss him but I do not ask a coin for a kiss. And if Wyatt told you this I know who told him and will be even with her. The Queen would never tell! A good woman, poor soul, and I pitied her—I did! I care nothing for you, but I pitied her.”

“Wyatt!” Anne’s voice was scorn distilled. “Do I need to ask a man, when all the French Court was giggling at you—‘O, she had not the wit to ask so much as a new cloak from a royal lover! One must pity the lady’s people! Does such angelic folly run in the family?’ I can tell you it stung me. It made me urgent to run for home whether there was to be war between France and England or not. Why, I saw the King’s Grace when he met the French King at Calais—gold and jewels and place and power pouring through his hands like water. It was ask and have if you had not been a fool. The French ladies—Blessed Virgin! how they laughed!”

Mary gasped. Amazing world! They blamed her—they scorned her—they made life a burden even to her good-nature—not because the King had been her careless sweetheart for a few insane weeks, but because she faced them empty-handed. They really did not mince matters. Only her poor good stepmother Lady Boleyn had said lamentably:

“Girls should let married men be. It is against Church and State to poach in another woman’s preserve. But if you did it to please his Grace——” Words failed her.

They also failed Mary. She had spent some miserable weeks at Hever, and then Anne came hurrying back from France to rub salt and vinegar into her wounds. Anne, with the airs of a reigning beauty, as indeed she had every right. Anne, who had set the fashions at the French Court, who had sung like all the seraphs, to harp and lute (with the words a little changed from the praises of heaven)!—Anne, whose notice made man or woman the mode, to be numbered in whose group made a young woman a fit partner for princes. Anne, who danced like a wave of the sea, and was as cold and bright. Anne, whose heart would never betray her head!—it is not too much to say that Mary loathed this brilliant heartless success with its dancing searchlight on her own failure. Wildly she looked about her now for a shaft—and found it.

“*Some* might guess you came home because you failed to find a fine French husband who would take the risk of your coquetries. *Some* might say some man kissing you had seen that on your throat which you always hide, and told the rest. *Some* might say——”

She halted suddenly at the white fury which faced her. No word did Anne Boleyn utter, but suddenly and wildly Mary broke down in a thunderstorm of tears. A strange scene. Anne sat composedly eying her as if she had been a show found contemptible.—She did indeed find her absolutely impossible to understand except as a besotted fool.

Yet no one could deny Mary Boleyn prettiness pushed to an extreme;—even Anne never attempted that adventure;—dark brown hair, gold-burnished, long brown eyes heavily lashed above and below, a shy childish smile on lips like parted cherries, the smile that cannot repel kisses even if unwelcome. Her figure a shade over-ripe for her age, with velvet curves and flushes to match her soft dimpled hands and the dimples in her cheeks. But with all this she moved with little grace and no dignity. Men were her masters and her fate, and not a man living but would have staked his life on the truth of Anne's taunts—granted always that the King had wooed the girl. If he had taken that trouble she had certainly yielded, for she could not do otherwise.

And as certainly she had wept with the Queen and felt herself a partner in her royal sorrows. A thornless woman-flower with no subtlety of charming. A daisy simple as milk and honey—balmy as the breath of kine at rest in lush meadows, sweet, but easy to forget, or to remember with a smile. Indeed Sir Thomas Boleyn had done ill to send that daughter to Court! The game was too fine for her—she would never win a round and would come back worse off than she went.

She had come back very much poorer. Queen Katharine, mother of one little-welcomed daughter and no son, was aging rapidly under her anxieties. Henry—the eighth of that name of English kings, golden-haired, florid, and amorous, had more than begun to feel the strain of his partial fidelity. The Queen knew it. Every woman at Court knew it whether personally concerned or otherwise. The men laughed discreetly and sympathetically in corners and—what more natural? they asked. The Queen had been a handsome young woman or Henry would never have married her, for all her birth and dowry. And he could easily have ridded himself of any obligation, since she had been his brother's widow—though virgin—and was six years older than himself. But to his eighteen years a handsome young woman of four and twenty with delicious auburn hair that fell below her knees was tempting as a sunny peach upon a warm wall to a thirsty bee. Still, if that was natural it was also natural that when her young grace had stiffened into massive dignity and her light heart had grown heavy in sorrowing for the loss of baby sons who would have surrounded her with strength and safety the King should look for pleasure with gayer and younger women.

Mary Boleyn was not the first to feel the ray of royal interest, and when it turned her way its warmth overwhelmed her. But she had not the wit to profit by Simonette's lessons or her chances, and here she was, her reputation cracked, not an extra coin in her purse and of land not so much as a sod to feed a lark. That was not the way with the King's favourites in

history and memory. But indeed Henry tired of her very quickly. His Katharine had been a good comrade, eager to please, drilled perforce in all the politics of Europe, more than half a saint, but yet kind and lenient and quick at the games and all the masques that pleased him. He knew her worth. And though it had been merry work to pluck the little cowslip and watch the dewy dawn of love in cloudless eyes, he tired very soon of that conquest and knew Mary Boleyn would no more make a tragedy of it than he an epic. He smiled quite contentedly on hearing she had been banished to the country. She had not the stock in trade to amuse him. But Anne's contempt when she arrived from France and found her sister bewept, ashamed, and as sorry for the Queen as if she had really harmed her!—To have that chance and make nothing of it! Idiot!

She caught Thomas Wyatt when he came down from Court to rusticate with them as he had done since he and her handsome brother George were friends as boys and scribbled their verses together. He had always been in love with Anne more or less, and now it was more, and desperate. And from that unwilling victim she dissected out with delicate fingers the details of Mary's amourette, swearing eternal secrecy and using the first chance and many after that to hurl it at her head. Unfortunate Mary!

She went off now, sobbing into her hands with rounded shoulders and bent head, Anne watching with speechless contempt. To cry over spilt milk? Futile and feminine to the last! And as she watched, her own brown eyes, so like Mary's in form, so passionately different in expression, glittered like a falcon's, and the strange yellow *reflets* which made their odd beauty showed under her lashes and danced like sunbeams in brown water. She was laughing—not so much at Mary as at the irony of human affairs. There was only one thing Mary had said which she would never forgive. One.

A little mirror covered in chased silver hung among a jingle of silver toys at her girdle. She slid the cover back and looked critically at the lovely brunette oval of her face, the disdainful exquisitely cut lips as apt to sneer as smile, the golden beauty of her skin with its damask glow acquired in country air and fed with country cream and eggs and bacon. She was the picture of health and young strength and activity, but with it all lissom as a willow and with the grace that makes every movement lovely. You may see it in the kitten when she crouches, eyes you with waving tail—springs, claws a mouse, pounces, and all so exquisitely that the whole is a poem in symbols and nothing to regret.

Yet Anne Boleyn sighed as she replaced the cover, and her dark eyes gloomed. Much will have more, and she was not satisfied. Nor was she so

beautiful when the corners of her mouth dropped and knowing there was none to see she let her face relax into discontent and anger. She had seen in the glass what she never forgot—what Mary's cruel thrust had lanced—a blemish that had coloured her very character and dyed it in grain since the first day she had realized her burden.

A double row of strangely carved and scented black and golden beads lay about her beautiful slender throat—but between them, thus anxiously hidden, an enlargement like an incipient goitre—small, unobservable except naked and in profile—but still—there! A flaw in perfection and the harder to bear. How she loathed it—how she sickened at the pure outline of her sister's throat, no tongue could tell—none but herself ever guessed. They forgot it. Mary had never spoken of it since they were children, but she remembered, was conscious of it every time she wreathed that graceful neck so gracefully. The thought was a bleeding wound. And that was not all.—Why did she wear sleeves falling in drapery from the shoulder which gave her the look of a winged thing as she glided to and fro through the great halls at Blickling and Hever Castle? Her disgrace—as she thought it, in sickening angry solitude. On the left hand a little blemish—a tiny indication of a sixth finger beneath the fifth. A man who had heard her described by a lover says—“But that which in others might be regarded as a defect was to her an occasion of additional grace by the skilful manner in which she concealed it from observation.”

Easily written but how far from true perception! She never forgot it. She writhed under it. What use to play divinely on the lute or virginals, to sing with eyes uplifted in love's own passion or in archest most inciting comedy (and in both she excelled) when all the time she was thinking—“Do they see? Are they thinking?” How could she forget that when a child she had heard her nurse whisper to another, “Look at her hand, her throat—the devil's marks in her body. She will come to a bad end—the devil's own brat! Her rages are like his own.” She had never forgotten that poisonous whisper, and though churchyard grass covered the whisperer she heard it in every tone, saw it in every look that she could not read to the bottom. She was set apart from other women. But it cut two ways. It made her a finished actress in all she said and did, a flowing changing creature of graces carried to absolute perfection, for she must be exquisite to cover this curse, and exquisite she was. But warped, abnormal, under it all, the loneliest girl in England, forever on the defensive, hard with fear, bold with shame. And not a soul knew her for what she really was.

What was she? She did not know herself, and that must wait for Time's moulding fingers.

Now, left alone by the sobbing Mary, she looked about her sharply and at last lifted a little silver whistle that hung among her toys and blew a bird's note upon it, then waited.

Far off a man's step in the woods, the crashing of twigs and brushing of leaves, and presently the boughs parted and he came out into the open and springing to her fell on his knees beside her as she sat. Thomas Wyatt, poet and courtier.

Pale, with a mobile sensitive face, grey eyes, and brown hair in queer waves about his forehead. He had a trick of tossing them back as impatiently as a horse his forelock, always eager, always impatient to hurry after the next thought beyond the one he was thinking at the moment, never overtaking the beauty that was ever on before—her first adorer, the first of how many who were to live and die for her!

"As you sit there in green you look like the dark spirit of the pines," he said passionately. "While I waited and—God! how you kept me waiting!—for I came over from Allington at dawn—I was choosing your tree. Not a beech in all its glory of green—nor an elm—nor a blossomed chestnut—but that lovely slender pine on the hill that has left the crowded woods to be alone. Anne, sweetheart, you are always alone, winter and summer, shine and snow. Let me into your secret! Let me! I have known your moods since you walked in leading-strings and——"

"You never knew one of them!" she said curtly. "I have no moods. I go straight on. People with moods divagate and wander, to one thing constant never. I am constant——"

"Not to me!" he said bitterly, "though once you let me believe—once you forced me to believe——"

She broke into a sunshiny smile.

"Once I let you believe!—and you a poet! Well, I am a poet too, and what I let you believe opened all the harps of heaven to you. And you reproach me! You that can write like an angel.—Indeed you have set your name on the scroll of English poets already. And your first verses were to me. And this is your thanks! I made you indeed!"

That was true. In the old Hall of Blickling, in the pleasancess of Hever, in the gardens, in the deep green wells of the wood—green like translucent seawater, those three—Anne, her brother George Boleyn, and Thomas Wyatt grew up inseparable as a trefoil on one stem. They wrote their verses together and in competition—each setting the subject in turn.

One might judge each by those subjects and the way they dealt with them, for the girl and boys came round each to his own whatever subject was set. Wyatt's were of love—love. His youthful verses hung there insistent as a cricket's chirp, but deepening as he grew older. Anne was his Muse—those long amber eyes with the yellow sparkles when she roused and kindled, the beautiful proud lips—with the singular depth between under-lip and rounded chin which gave so much character to her face, the musing sternness of expression—unlike a girl, which flashed into such sweetness or pride at a breath that he held his own to see it—to all these his words and he clung as a bee to clover blossoms, and when his gentle sister Mary rode over from Allington to spend a night at Hever, awed and dazzled by the glitter of young Anne she would whisper in his ear:

“If you could win her, Thomas, you would set the world flaming with your love-verses. But she will soar too high for us!”

That Wyatt did not believe and had his own reasons for disbelief. Anne was lovely but not inaccessible to the lover. Far from it. To the poet always inaccessible. Always some barrier however near he came—the dark side of the moon hidden behind light that he and all the world might bathe in. For to him she was Beauty—and who holds Beauty a prisoner in words?

For George—his verses ran to the sinister and cynical. The death's head must be wreathed with budding roses. The lily must have a maggot in her heart. Thomas told him and truly that this was Italianate;—an unwholesome miasma from all the new splendour and crime in the country of the great learning and riches. They had both visited Italy, and George had brought home its sardonic humour with him.

And Anne, her eyes deepened over all their verses. Hers were on the model of the French poets she read with Simonette, trilling rhymes for lute and harp—as often French as English, for Simonette taught well. And so, like birds in a nest they would chipper and chatter and be glad and sad and kind and fierce and hustle one another like scratch-cats all in a few minutes. And if Wyatt did not know her who should? And yet he knew he did not.

“I made you!” she repeated. At all events she knew him.

“Do I deny it? I had rather you made me than the Almighty,” he said with profane tenderness. “Only, having made me, keep me—if but to be your caged linnet. And tell me, why did Mary run away crying? I saw her.”

Anne replied with the kind of haughty contempt Mary inspired in her always.

“Because I reproached her with the King and the little fool was ashamed.”

A moment's silence, and then he touched the fair right hand that lay like a blossom on the rough bark.

“Heart's delight, we should not be too virtuous! The poor sweet child! How could she say No to the King? You who are above every lover even if he possessed you—should you rebuke her because she has no art in denying? And if so——”

For all answer she opened her eyes upon him and laughed. And Wyatt thought he knew her! What use to explain? Presently—having allowed time to the blackbird for his last roulade, she said as if reflecting deeply:

“What like is the King, Thomas? Mary weeps like a November drizzle when I ask and is speechless. My father says—a big tall man—who will be gross one day, but finely featured and a majestic presence. What more?”

“Much more,” Wyatt answered thoughtfully. “Fair-skinned, golden-haired, hawk-eyed, but eats and drinks more than enough, and already it has smurred the outlines. His attraction is his geniality—a jollier hail-fellow-well-met you never knew. But beware! for he can leap back into the King and you shudder beneath the lion's paw in a horrid minute. His mind a jumble of romance and sordid trickishness and overbearing lordship and lust and majesty and brutality. He writes verses not despicable and orders a man to the scaffold if he obstructs the view. The ideal sparring with the gross and getting a daily fall. A coarse speaker and doer, but one women are mad for. Very male of very male, and if he stoops to conquer lets them know (if they have eyes) that they will do the kneeling later. In short, a master to all but himself.”

She turned this over in her mind, then asked:

“And the Queen?”

“A handsome woman once, now too large and heavy. It matches a kind of noble heaviness in her nature. O, she points to heaven true as the pole-star to the North. I like that massiveness of nobility in her—it puts weight on the side of all that is worthy. She is a great Spanish princess and Queen of England, and it makes her pride a high virtue so that her own nature obliges her to nobilities she cannot escape if she would. She has no wings but she can walk on thorns smiling. But why do you ask, sweetheart?”

She wreathed her long throat and looked at him over her shoulder most sweetly but with entire incomprehension of his words.

“Prepare to weep, True Thomas! I am sick of Hever Castle already, sicker of Blickling. I have already moved my father to get me a place at Court. Why not? My own mother would have seen to it had she been alive. My stepmother is dull and low-born and she thinks of nothing. She has not the breeding of us great folk. I like her well enough;—but after France, to be shut up with her here and with Mary——”

She paused and looked at him sidelong.

Sick of the glories of Blickling—and so soon! His mind stranded on that like a ship on a rock and so stayed. Sick of the noble amplitudes of glade and meadow and the running streams and golden shields of buttercups defying the noonday sun! Sick of the past. Forgetting the young love and joy and all their April of life together—cruel! No memory softened her bright taunting eyes, golden and hard as a falcon’s. Suddenly a suspicion shot through his brain. He darkened.

“And this is why you must hear of the King?”

She laughed him off.

“Only because he is the King and the green gosling’s lover. The Queen I saw—and the King too, long ago, when I went over with the Princess Mary his sister when she married the old French king. But I swear my head was so full of France that I never gave a thought to either—child that I was. Just fourteen. And now I am twenty and a wiseacre.”

“But, God-a-mercy, have you not had your fill of courts?” he asked, aghast—he hated the thought of her going among the loose lavish men and women who made up the Court in London. In France—no more innocence—God knows!—but yet a kind of witty delicacy and refinement wholly lacking in London. She seemed to him a gay heedless white-sailed barque, laden with incalculable treasure in gold and heaven’s own jewels, ready to adventure among gross plunderers who could not even gauge the value of what they looted.

“Stay here!” he said beseechingly.

“Here! And grow all over moss and mildew! My good Thomas—you little know what I was in Paris! The good Queen Claude was nothing beside me. Men bowed to her but they followed me. O, I remember—it was one night. A masquerade. We danced. My dress—pure fancy of my own—and Simonette’s—but lovely. A cape of blue velvet starred with gold, and a long coat of blue watered silk lined with ermine—long drifting sleeves. Blue velvet shoes with a diamond star on each, and wide gold wings on my head that framed my face in gold. I called myself the Court Fool—and mercy!

how King Francis laughed at the songs and jests I made to amuse them. The whole Court sat round me and laughed. I ask you!—True Thomas, would you bury all that in the Hever meadows? I tell you the King complained to the English Ambassador because I would stay in Paris no longer. But how could I? If kings will fight, poor pretty women must scurry to shelter.”

He looked at her in a kind of dismay. She was so haughty, like a proud falcon who may perch on a man’s wrist but with her golden eyes always away, searching the sky for prey. He had not remembered this aloofness. Certainly it had grown on her in France. And who could wonder? England was not likely to be ignorant of the English girl who had trained fashion to be English and made the greatest French nobles—even King Francis himself—dance to her sweet pipings.

“Don’t pull such a long face!” she said. “Use your wits, man! We Boleyns have crept up in the world from my old mercer great-grandfather until my father could marry my mother—the Duke of Norfolk’s daughter. I am half Howard. We have good Irish blood in us too from the Ormonds. I wish I could marry my first cousin Surrey—the Duke’s eldest son—Anne Surrey! Beautiful. But I am nothing to him. We were children together, and that cuts love.”

“Does it?” Wyatt asked bitterly. He knew better. He had adored Anne when she was promoted to her first pony.

“It should, anyway!” said Anne candidly. “But you see how it is. My brother George needs promotion. And Mary has disgraced us—the fool! So I wrote to my father—he is always in London—a good Mistress Mouse letter saying I must bear my share of family troubles and surely my experience of courts would not be wasted now. I knew I could trust him to set off my little play-tricks, for he was not born yesterday and likes this world’s goods as well as another. Well—last night comes his messenger. Allow me, sir, to present to you Mademoiselle Anne de Boleyn, niece to my lord the Duke of Norfolk, maid of honour to the Queen’s Majesty and leader of the revels at the Court of his Majesty King Henry the Eighth.”

She got up and holding her skirts out executed a prodigious curtsy and sat down again laughing like the ripples of a brook. Indeed her laughter never had warmth. It was a cold crystal sweetness. It drove him wild.

“Anne—no—no!” he cried, and caught at her hands, but she pulled them away. “You shall not go, I swear it. After Mary’s business—it is not fitting you should go. They will laugh—they will watch.”

“Boors! Let them! I could drive them before me in regiments—I who know France!” she said, laughing. Her audacity shocked and charmed him,

but yet he quivered to think of her among the lewd intrigues, the men that no graceful quips could repel, the surging overbearing passions;—what could a lovely girl of twenty do to protect herself if——

But still she laughed. Did he suppose that Simonette—the invaluable all-seeing Simonette, friend of every waiting-woman in France and England—had not given her a *carte du pays* of London as well as Paris? She said as much, and he burst out:

“You have no heart. You value no one. You would see spots in the sun if you could look at him, and like him the better for it. You and Mary are alike—and God! how different. Mary——”

She laughed with perfect good-humour.

“If you prefer Mary, love Mary—write verses for her! She will be grateful for a little kindness to patch up her pride!”

“She is more innocent than you in spite of her broken pride. And yet——No! With your love of lovely words and sounds, you could be a crowned angel, Anne, leading the choir of Beauty.”

His eyes glowed on her. “God, how you will be lonely at Court!” he said. “There, their aims are brutish. They will stare at you with great eyes and will not understand. They will turn your gold to withered leaves like a spell read backward.”

Sure of herself she looked at him with a lovely perception of his meaning. The soft beam warmed his chilled heart—so quick to believe and forgive.

“Believe in me and make me what you believe. Paint the fair picture, True Thomas, and I shall grow like it. That is the truth under the jesting. But now listen. Be near me in London. And why? I want to gather about me a little band—not myself only but you and my brother George and my cousin Surrey and—well, you shall know later. But we will set the tune and the Court shall dance and the King find us more heartening than the Court fool and—I have not the Irish strain of gaiety in me to let it rust for want of use.”

But he was not dazzled. He hesitated and said:

“Does Simonette go with you?”

“How otherwise? I must have a companion not above stitching and copying and patching. We are not too rich, God knows. And she is Paris-trained and has the finest taste in the world. A French girl above all!”

He said suddenly:

“I hate Simonette. I smell corruption when she goes by.”

She rose instantly and walked off—her head tossed up with as much pride as if it were a crown. She swept down the glade over the glittering kingcups as if a brocade train six yards long flowed after her. For a minute she loathed Wyatt. Simonette was her slave and indispensable. That he should dare! And yet—yet—uneasiness stirred in her heart as when a little green snake for a second rears its head among the grass blades and then sinks it and is gone—only a ripple tracing its sinuous way beneath the green shelter. Her secrets, such as they were, were all in the firm cold clasp of Simonette, whose hands even on the hottest August day were as cold as her heart. But you knew what to count on and were not disturbed! Thomas Wyatt strode after her.

“Anne, forgive me. I know nothing of her. A man must not wrong a woman, and I suppose she loves you well.”

She turned on her foot and looked at him hardily.

“I could not swear to that. Simonette is honest. She does not pretend to those blossoms of the heart with which men and women dress out their selfishness. Look at you! You make a divine mystery of love, but what all the fine words cover is the natural desire of a man for a woman. Suppose the smallpox caught me and seamed my smooth skin and blurred my eyes. No; Simonette says, ‘Mademoiselle Anne, the world belongs more to wit than beauty. You have both. I have no beauty but I have wits as clean-cut as daggers. Where is the height to which we cannot climb? Therefore I love to serve you. Were you like Mademoiselle Mary your sister——’ ”

Wyatt made a gesture of disgust.

“Faugh!—and you talk of Mary to that wench! Poor Mary! Anne, I beseech you——”

“All the world talks of Mary!” she shot at him, and was gone in earnest now, running as smooth and swift as a boy, with her skirts picked up high.

From behind a tree further up emerged a young woman of about thirty, plump and full-breasted, olive complexion set off by bright black eyes and hair. Her lips were full, moist and scarlet, but she was only provocative, not handsome, too fat and moon-faced and the threat of a double chin already. But none the less she wore her flowered dress beautifully and could draw eyes. She turned a curious fixed gaze on Wyatt for a moment, and then Anne thrust her arm through Simonette’s and they went off together, whispering.

Chapter Two

WYATT thrust his hands in his pockets and stood frowning, then walked slowly up by the herb-garden—one of the most enchanting spots of an enchanting garden. Bushes of grey-green juniper, hedges of grey-blue lavender filling the air with their clean perfume. Bushes of small sweet-scented roses for washes, beds of rosemary and balsam, sprigged thyme and mint, sharp southern-wood for lads to wear on Sundays, with bitter rue to follow if need be; indeed a garden of country delights. The air was heavy with the murmurous music of bees. It came and went like waves as the busy brown-velvet plunderers swung heavily laden through the air to their hives or clung intoxicated to tiny blossoms.

And in the midst, herself a flower, though a hanging-headed one, was Mary in a dress of pink stuff with a basket on her arm, filling it with mint and marjoram for the still-room and all the myriad recipes and decoctions of Lady Boleyn. She looked up, seeing Wyatt, and made to go away. He was Anne's man—lost in Anne, body and soul, and had never spared herself any but careless kindness like a big, somewhat contemptuous brother's. Now, as he stood in the grass-path, there was a different look—true pity, anxious to repair past oversights.

“Stay, Mary!” he said. “I have not seen you since you came back from London and——”

“And you did not want to!” said the poor pink rose with a display of her harmless thorns. “Please let me pass, Mr. Wyatt. I am nobody's child now!”

“You are my friend and ever will be. I made too little of you before, Mary, but I know better now.”

Something drew him to the kind simple thing despised by all because she had not put her price higher.—She looked at him in great amaze and then her tears gathered and rolled down her cheeks, clinging to the black lashes like a heavy dew.

“Don't be kind to me. That I cannot bear!” she said. “They call me a bad girl now and say no man but a fool will ever look at me. Thomas, is it true? I

heard Simonette say that if I had filled my lap with gold, suitors would come thick as these bees. But never now. Is it true?"

"Not true!" he asserted. "You will have suitors, Mary. But do you think of them so soon? Had you no love for the King's Grace?"

She stared at him bewildered.

"I never knew! O Thomas, understand, for you have known me from a child. How could I refuse the King? He is so great and golden and splendid and speaks always as if it must be. But indeed I pitied the Queen.—Poor good lady! She wept, and I with her. Indeed, if Anne and Simonette could let me alone I believe I am a modest girl still. At least I feel no different. The world is the same. Does it make any difference? But, thank our Blessed Lady, Anne is going soon and Simonette with her, and then we shall have peace. I have brought recipes from the Queen's own confectioner and so my stepmother will forgive me—sweet things that would melt in your mouth, and these herbs are for washes that will make a girl's skin lily and rose and dissolve the brownest freckle that ever spotted her cheek. Anne has asked for a boxful. And who can refuse Anne? You think you hate her and then she saddens and you love her. O, she will not trip like me! She will marry a great lord—I know who she has her eye on!"

To that Wyatt knew he must not listen. He stayed to cheer Mary and to pile her basket and then went with her to the Castle where good-hearted Lady Boleyn bestowed a rosy welcome on him and would as soon have kissed him as look at him. And George Boleyn strolled in, dark and careless, but his eyes softer and kinder than his sister's, and clapped Wyatt on the back and made much of him. And they went to dinner in the great dining-hall where departed Boleyns looked stiffly down on outrageous youth, and Anne came gliding in with the demure Simonette at her heels, and afterwards the young ones got out their lutes, and the two men with Anne sang heavenly madrigals until even Mary picked up her lute and joined in, linnet-voiced. Simonette went off demurely, and good Lady Boleyn slept in her big chair, and still the four sang with voices harmonized to each other by long use, and even the westward sloping shadows stayed to hear, and the birds were silent in the trees. A nest of singing-birds indeed at Hever—to out-sing the blackbirds and thrushes.

The afternoon shadows of the great beeches lay eastward when Anne laid down her lute and Wyatt his. George Boleyn continued idly plucking a few chords and humming in an undertone—a beautiful young man in his tawny cloth coat and a collar opened at the neck and flung back loose to show the fine throat which gave dignity to his head. Mary had gone off with

Lady Boleyn, complaining of a furious headache, and no wonder—after her tears.

George said presently:

“Have you heard, Thomas, from this self-conceited little ass how she intends to set the Court dancing to her tune? Her years in France as the pet jackanapes of all the giddiest humourists there has turned her head. But though I know nothing of Court life here I think it will not be so easy. We English are heavier stuff—lumpish—good bread against the light French pastry. No, Mrs. Anne, I cannot see you and Wyatt and me changing the English taste for heavy eating and drinking and perpetual masses and slaughter of beasts into wit and laughter and gay acting and singing. Eh, Wyatt?”

It could be noted how unceremonious his tone was. Even among friends there was a certain formality of address—which could spring in a moment to brutal coarseness if needful. But that was not the Boleyn manner. Partly by nature, partly by choice, they were cool, light, ironic to all the world and even to each other. Mary was ill placed with Anne and George in this respect. She had not the Boleyn manner nor could she acquire it, but she felt its immense assertion of superiority and was ill at ease. Wyatt could not wholly fall into it, but he too worshipped the brother and sister as a peerless pair—Apollo and Diana shooting golden arrows of superiority at lesser folk—stupidities who were apt to be wounded and dislike their wounds and the archers.

“It is very easy to make enemies at Court,” he observed, “and I own I hope you will both tap before you to sound the way like a blind man with a stick. The Queen is excellently good, but I confess she has reached the point where she is apt to think pleasant things partake of the nature of sin—unless she happens to have her reasons. She is still a stickler for what pleases the King.”

“I note,” said Anne carelessly, “that such people object to pleasures not because they are wrong but because other people like them.”

“And yet that is not the Queen,” Wyatt said thoughtfully. “How shall I say?—She thinks chastity and modest behaviour necessary for men and women alike because God has so commanded and the national good requires. But she likes goodly reading and pastimes—all but hunting, which she never attends.—Better if she did! The King loves it.”

“And why not? Animals, being soulless brutes, are made for our amusement,” thrust in Anne.

“She pities them. She likes shooting at the butts, and cards, and the masquerades the King devises. Or seems to like them, to please him.”

George Boleyn aimed a pebble at a bird, missed it, and said carelessly:

“Yes—and he knows her for a dull old frump who pretends youth and gaiety to please him. But I believe Anne is right. I believe the way to succeed at Court is to find new pleasures for the King. He must have been hard driven when he took to Mary for amusement.”

Nothing astonished Wyatt more than the indifferent contempt with which the two spoke of Mary. Anger, hatred—many other qualities he could have understood, but their indifference puzzled and saddened him. He changed the subject.

“And do you and Anne conquer the world alone, and what are your weapons? I allow beauty and wit. But what else?”

“Impudence!” George answered, yawning. “Effrontery. And Anne’s French tricks. She has enough pleasures up that big sleeve of hers to amuse the Court for a month of Sundays. And I have the rest. You should see Anne and me dance the Harvest Courtship Dance that made the King of France laugh till he swore there was never such a maid in the world. Besides, we do not trust altogether to ourselves. Sir Francis Weston has come to Court. He married a Moresby of Cumberland—a great young lady of family and estates—and he spends her money royally. She too is an Anne, but a very different guess-sort to this” (he touched Anne’s cheek with a caressing finger) “—fair and eager and madly in love with him. And we shall have Mark Smeaton to play our music.”

Wyatt made a gesture of disgust.

“Mark Smeaton? A low-born romantic foul-minded ass. I would not have him near a clean maid.”

“But I would use him as I wanted him!” said Anne pertly. “And I would say thus far and no further, Master Mark! For there is no such dancer under heaven, and he has a delicious tenor voice, and his touch on the lute and regals—— He learnt in France. George and I are good and very good, but Mark is one of God’s choristers.”

“The devil’s. O, he too has his music!” said Wyatt disgustedly. He knew things of Smeaton which he would reveal to George but never to Anne—Anne, who knew every one of them and more, from Simonette’s quick tongue. Indeed, she had once suspected a *tendresse* between Mark and Simonette which she had not confided even to George. Wyatt tried to look at her dispassionately. “You are a very fashionable young maid, Mistress Anne.

You will set every girl at Court wild with envy of your French fripperies and what not.—But I have this to say—Do not make enemies of the women. They have tongues like asps, and *you* have not all the art in the world. They also have a little, and they will tell their tales against you with such pious lips and truthful eyes as would deceive even the elect. Therefore walk circumspectly.”

The answer was on her lips when a horseman came riding up the drive, bowing to the saddlebow as he came. They all recognized him as Spenlow, an old Boleyn retainer, and Anne waved her hand while the young men went off to meet him. Presently, without a word to her they turned back with him—he walking and leading his horse—and disappeared round the bend of the great drive veiled with shadowy beech boughs, on their way to the stables. Yawning, she gathered up her lute and went in and upstairs and so along the great corridor to Mary’s room.

“Don’t come in. My head is tearing me. I must sleep,” said a muffled voice from the bed, and Anne went on still carelessly to her own room with its beautiful oriel window looking out toward the front.

It was hardly worth while for Wyatt, yet one would not lose a captive, and she took a comb and swept her brown-black hair into curves and coils upon the little head which could bear its black-bronze massiveness proudly. The height made her face peaked and mischievous as a flower fairy’s, so rich the golden damask of her velvet cheeks and long brown eyes.

“Fruit-face!” she said to the glass. “I used to think my lips were too dark a damask rose. A little more and they would be purple—fruit-purple. But it suits me. How many men have kissed them! But kisses leave no mark, and if a maid keeps her maidenhood no more need be asked of her. I can tell my husband I am pure as I came from my mother and he will ask no more.”

Looking steadily at her reflection she took out a paste of French rouge and deepened the colour on her cheeks.

“Simonette!” she called. A door within opened and shut and Simonette came hurrying—a dress of russet brown damask heaped in her arms.

“Anne!” she cried. “Denton has run up through the garden to say your father is returning and gentlemen with him. Some courtiers. Master Wyatt and your brother have gone to meet him. I know not who it is, but he thinks my Lord Percy is one—my lord the Earl of Northumberland’s heir. I have brought one of your new gowns, and I bid you set the French frontlet on your hair. No—you have made your cheeks too red. Vile! Wash it off. No sign-painting!”

Simonette was the Court of Appeal in such matters. She touched Anne's cheeks with a scented cream made in the castle still-room and sweet with Hever herbs and blossoms. She put her into the red-russet damask that made her own colour noble against a noble background. She set upon her head a curious head-dress designed by herself and Anne (it may still be seen in her portraits)—a stiff band of russet velvet raying outward like the Russian *kashnovik*, the outer edge rimmed with large garnets of glowing crimson. For little money it made a beautiful show, and the shape diminished Anne's face to a marvellous delicacy—accentuating the freakish chin and whimsical mouth and greating the long eyes in black lashes.

“Put on your distant air!” she commanded, and Anne turned on her a look of proud composure—a questionmark to any intruder. “Now smile!”—and with a flash as when the sun leaps from a cloud the face bloomed and brightened—all mobility and response.

“You had made a fine actor were women allowed on the stage,” said Simonette laconically. “And what then?—for surely all the world is a stage and every woman her own heroine if no one else's. And look!—past the fourth great beech they come! That will be Percy next your father on the right. The man on the left I do not know, but—Holy Queen of Heaven!—he sits his horse well!”

Anne looked out of the side of the oriel. It was a group of six gentlemen—a bunch of retainers riding apart. At this distance features were not too plain, but she saw that her father stooped a little after his manner and rode cap in hand as if to cool his forehead with the scented air from the garden with its great beds of gilliflowers (wallflowers) and coronations. But indeed all the men were bar-headed. The one on Sir Thomas Boleyn's left caught a sunbeam through the leaves and it turned his head golden like a saint's in a missal. A big man with thighs well braced to his horse and the reins held lightly but warily, he deserved Simonette's commendations. A great florid handsome cavalier riding a horse heavy almost as a dray horse—no less would stand his weight.

“That is the make of man that women can fire to madness,” she said. —“A dark lean man like Percy or like your brother kindles like brushwood—a big flare and it outs. But this kind smoulders a long time. Of both a woman may make her market. Go down, Anne, and sit in the small western room. I have done my work so that even your father shall be proud of his girl.”

She was right.—Glow and bloom and a splendour of dark wealthy red-brown to set off her own rich tints. The swaying young beauty turned to go

down the long way to the stair—but first her eyes caught Simonette’s.

“What I never understand is why one woman should be so proud of another woman’s looks, Simonette. You are not beautiful as I am, you say, and it is true. Then why do you not hate me? I think I might hate you if you shone me down.”

“But I am older than you and, you have said, wiser, Anne. To each her own gift. And my wisdom tells me that love and hate are only part of the world’s stagecraft. If I hated you I should still set off your beauty because Beauty is the star of the play. Gold runs to her and men’s wills, and power ties her velvet shoes. But why should I not love you also? I have taught you from a child. Had not Mademoiselle Mary turned her back on me——”

Anne shrugged her shoulders with a quick French gesture of disdain and went light-footed to the stairs. Simonette still hugged the oriel window lozenge above with the arms in gules and argent and glorious hues of the great families with whom the Boleyns claimed kinship. Her gaze fixed and searched as the men came riding slowly up, chatting and laughing boisterously, to the great castle-door, iron-studded and barred and capable of stout defense. Presently she put her hand in the hanging pocket that dangled by her side, slung from the waist. She drew out a few coins, and searching among them took one and looked at it steadily—then at the men below her, now dismounting. She tossed the money back into the purse and ran like a hare downstairs.

To Anne, seated in the beautiful panelled room with its carved dark old oak enshrining her as a casket holds its jewel, entered her father leading the men, yet drawing aside a hair to let Percy and the other precede him as guests should. She laid aside the book of Breton romances of the Fairy Melusine, the Lady of Lusignan, she was reading and rose and gliding to him dropped on one knee to take his blessing. Reverence to a father came first in those days, and men liked it, for daughters, though far behind sons, were good commodity in marriage-making and brought excellent grist to the family mill—if such as men desire and will pay down fat prices for. He imparted his blessing sanctimoniously and with hidden but hopeful pride. The Boleyns might not be rich in money, but when a man can bring his guests to such a castle as Hever set in acres of waving forest and meadow where they may see the tall deer glimpse through the thickets and hear the rocketing clatter of pheasants and see the burnished peacocks strut the lawns—and above all may stare at such a daughter of the Boleyns aglow in a room that spoke of family pride, he may bless the Lord for a goodly heritage and not unreasonably hope for additions.

And first, as she rose, with many hand-wavings and the space between his meeting nose and chin narrowing with his smiles he said:

“Daughter Anne, I present to you a most worthy and hopeful young gentleman, my Lord Percy, heir to my lord the Earl of Northumberland and in attendance on his Grace the Lord Cardinal Wolsey. You shall know that this young gentleman adds all the graces of courts to the daring of the field. My lord, this is my unworthy daughter, Mistress Anne, late maid of honour to her Majesty’s Grace Queen Claude of France.”

Bows, reverences. The young lord took her hand like a rose-petal on the back of his own and after the English custom kissed her cheek devoutly. She felt the thrill of his lips. His eyes were ardent; his face, dark and manly, had a weakish jaw, sloped too abruptly from the chin to the ear. By an unkind stretch you might call the noble Percy a little lantern-jawed. She was certain Wyatt would do so. But there was no time to consider.

Again her father’s voice, two sizes too big and deep for his lean body, boomed in her ear.

“And, daughter Anne, I present you to a very worthy good knight and stout man of his hands, Sir Stephen Lloyd, a right good servant of the King in his Scots and French wars.—Salute him, and now with your stepmother make good cheer to these gentlemen, for they ride on in an hour to meet with my Lord Cardinal Wolsey at Amsden as he comes down from the North. Sirs, I am told my second daughter lies tormented of the headache, but what the house can it will.”

Sir Stephen kissed the Boleyn rose also, with lips not unused to the like exercise. The Percy’s were hurried and shy. The other’s moist and lingering.

Lady Boleyn meek and flurried in black velvet, George Boleyn perfect-mannered in his country clothes, handing the rich wines and humbler but delicious cordials—cherry and grape and what not made by Lady Boleyn’s and Mary’s hands,—Wyatt seconding him with hospitable elegance acquired in Italy. Sir Stephen Lloyd drinking deep with a keen blue eye on Anne gliding here and there and opposing cool maidenliness to Percy’s eager questioning glances—these were the vignettes that came like beads threaded on a chain of interest and conjecture. Not that guests were rare at Hever. In those days of foul and evil-smelling inns gentlemen like the Boleyns kept almost open house for other gentlemen riding North, South, East, and West on the King’s business and their own. But yet this was an unusual occasion. Sir Stephen Lloyd was a new name to her—and a fine figure of a man—big and burly and large-cheeked with narrow laughing blue eyes a little choked in flesh, above a close reddish beard and the golden hair that had caught her

eye from the window. But Percy was more her business. He came up, silver cup in hand, and drank her especial health, and his eyes said so very much more than his mouth that Simonette's image of a fire of brushwood crackled in her mind. He pleaded for a song and appealed to his fellow-guest Sir Stephen as to whether it would not sweeten the wine, but the occasion passed because her father was pressing Sir Stephen himself for a song, and he caught up a lute of George's and in a manly pleasant baritone trolled out a song of "pastime and good merriment," and after huge applause the talk ranged further afield and music was forgotten.

And now the shadows lengthened in good earnest, and Sir Thomas must ride with his guests to his bounds where the Lord of the Castle would bring them to where they must lie for the night to meet the mighty Lord Cardinal who ruled King and kingdom—and he a butcher's son of Ipswich!—one of Simonette's favourite examples of how brains rule brawn.

The men rose, and the commotion of farewells and stirrup-cups began. Sir Stephen kissed Anne's cheek in farewell—a custom, no more. But he came as near her mouth as he could, and she felt the heat of his lips through the red-gold hair that clothed them.

"Farewell, fair lady. And if, as your father tells me, you ride soon to London, may I be there to lift you from the saddle and put my riding-cloak under your feet."

She smiled a little distantly in thanking him. She expected more than an unknown knight's mantle for floor-cloth. Then came Percy, while the others laughed and swore in a storm of good-fellowship and wine.

"Fairest lady, you ride to London. I will be there—trust me—to see a world's wonder. Your sweet eyes have——No, I talk madness. Forgive me. I have tasted little wine yet I am drunk."

He pressed his lips on her cheek—hard—which was not in the custom, before he released her hand. His lips burnt her—she felt the clenched teeth through them in the eagerness of his kiss. She did not smile but loosed one dark arrow from her eyes before she dropped them. And so satisfied him. He went, looking back and stumbling.

The men rode off commending her looks, not delicately. Another custom. And the servants cleared away cups and goblets and wine left disorderly about the room and in the hall where Sir Stephen had set his silver-gilt cup on the hall table—a huge acreage laid on trestles, it had overset and the dregs of bright red wine like blood trickled over the edge and made a little pool on the stone floor.

She went and stood outside the door in the cooling air and was tired and cloyed after the excitement—a little sickened by their noise and drink and lusty manhood—hunters of women as of deer. Her taste was fastidious even to fantasy, though she could bend it to what she would to serve her occasion. But at the moment, with twilight dropping soft veils about her, she pictured a world where women might dictate the laws and soften these bulls and boars of men to something more knightly—more like the pattern she and George had invented together—men passionately loving with the intellect as the flesh, yet cool and dispassionate in manner and surface, masking flame with ice—except for the beloved, and even for her holding treasures in reserve that she must not count too quickly. She had seen the type in France in men of one or two of the families so great that they had difficulty in condescending to royalty, and when the King called them “*mon cousin*” it was easy to see where they thought the honour lay. But even these one or two were not perfect—no—too *gaillard*—too faithless. She wanted the English doggedness of passion shot through with the jewel-like French fire and a dancing star of gaiety. She—— George came spurring back across the grass to cut a corner.

“Anne, hurry—look for the King’s riding gloves. He believes he left them here.”

Enough to startle a maid from a dream. Sir Stephen—Mary—the King—Percy!—a jumble of ideas stormed her brain. For a second she stared at him as he flung himself from his horse.

“The King?”

“Surely you knew. His craze is to go masquerading, and I suppose Mary—— But he knows my father or any other man in England would lick his boots to clean them. We must take this as a token of great favour. We are forgiven for Mary!”

His cool sarcastic tone roused her. She looked about and spied the leather riding gloves under the hall table. The fingers of one dripped red wine. She shook it hurriedly, noting how plain and workmanlike it was, nothing but a small H.R. on each gauntlet. She dried it on her handkerchief and threw the stained rag away. That handkerchief stained with blood-red wine was to recur to her mind on another and distant day. George snatched the gloves and was off—his great roan horse leaping the low fences and sending the sod flying like spray from his iron-shod hoofs.—So kings’ errands are run.

But Anne went slowly up to take off her bravery. Simonette awaited her.

“Anne, did you know—did you know? I scribbled it on a leaf I tore from my lady’s recipe book, and I hung round the door, but then I dared not send it. Men are such fools. And yet not one of them spit out the truth—as close as oysters—but I knew him from the money in my bag. He loves to mask and take people in, and they play on it when he thinks he is not known. Did he notice you?”

“How can I tell? They were drinking like—like men. All but Percy. He noticed me. Fire of brushwood, Simonette! Will anything come of it? We shall see in London.”

But Simonette’s mind was on the King. A handsome man if a little gross and fleshy. A roving eye. Madness of the Queen to think she could hold a bull of a man like that! A herd of wives like the Sultan’s would be more to the purpose and each a full share of favour. And yet, they said, religious. But was it not strange to think of Mademoiselle Mary? Suppose she had come down all bewept and imploring! Heavens, the courage of kings! How had he risked it? But what need a king care? Indeed he had done her a very great honour if she had the sense of a chicken!

Anne laughed and recounted events and agreed. Simonette influenced her like a chemical combination that made a kind of effervescent coarse lightness she never had alone. Those rapacious little French paws and eyes dug and ferreted and saw and pursued, and life became a hunt in which success was the dodging prey. It interested her profoundly, and the more so because she knew that she also influenced Simonette, who dragged and wearied without her unless indeed she was off on Anne’s business which was her own. They were like the separate and yet unified halves of one woman each prompting and sustaining the other—not friends but something more intimate, thought and action, word and deed. Who can find words for those strange interactions and reactions of human relationship?

Sir Thomas and George came back—Sir Thomas full of stories of the King’s graciousness. He had asked after Mary coolly and had mentioned her as young and unripe. “You should find her a good husband, friend; the Queen has a gift for her when she weds.” And he had put his arm genially about Sir Thomas’s neck, a handsome mark of royal favour. He had commended Hever for an agreeable seat for a rising man. What could that mean? And he had said of Anne that she had the French air to perfection and that Sir Thomas should take thought before bestowing her. Sir Thomas felt that good might yet come of Mary’s mischance. Naturally the King could say nothing, but it had picked the family out in his mind, and he might feel

he owed them something. He had talked very pleasantly with George and laughed at his cool sallies.

“You are like your sister Mademoiselle Anne,” he said.

George himself had little to tell, but when he and she parted in the long corridor for the night he said with carelessness:

“The King likes the French touch. He is sick of roast beef and beer, and sour Spanish dignity like whey gone sour, and being ruled by a churchman as lewd and servile as any baron. There is a new age coming in Europe. Gaiety, beauty, splendour, romance. I wonder——”

He went off. Anne could not sleep. The day had been disturbing, look at it how you will. She flung open the great casements and dared the night air, mother-naked for her bed.

An enchanted night, balmy with the breath of roses and honeysuckle. A great full moon drenched the world with moonlight, and below her the gardens lay in cold black and white magnificence of light and dark—the roses blanched, the grass bleached against black shadows, colour only a memory. The trees were pillars of ancient darkness lifting towers of glittering white leaves to the glimmering sky. Stars paled in the brimmed glory, and all the world stared upward awake and spellbound. No sleep. Bright eyes watched in the thickets, stirred, whispered. A bird chirped and was silent. And something that slept in Anne—that Simonette could never waken—looked, waited—enchanted also into breathless suspense. The meaning? Ah, who could tell? So fair dead women had watched before her.—Dust has closed Helen’s eyes. But they had had their day. She also must have hers; that other women leaning—leaning out into the fathomless ocean of beauty might say—“Anne also—that Anne,—she lived!”

She drew in from the immeasurable tranquillity and tried to sleep but could not. She lit her candle and read of the lures of Melusine until the dawn put out the night’s glory.

But it was of Percy she thought. Not of Henry the King.

Chapter Three

WHEN ANNE came up to London, riding along the muddy tracks with Simonette beside her and a stout body of retainers before and behind, she had none of the exhilaration of the caged bird set free. She saw life as an anxious business, for the goods girls carry for marketing are in their nature frail and easily deteriorated. Mary stood as an awful warning that chastity is a commodity too valuable to be exchanged unless against gilt-edged securities, and that as religion and policy go hand in hand in estimating its value high a girl must be guided by the union of authority of this world and the next. It was much easier for her than for Mary to see the situation in its realities, because all the intellect which should have been fairly divided between the two of them had gone to Anne and had brought with it the inevitable coldness which is physical as well as mental. To Mary men were delightful warm-blooded human creatures, able to bestow enchantment in their worshippings and temptings, snares irresistible. To Anne—animals a little contemptible but eminently manageable; their appetites when matched against her intellect and graces setting a delightful game which, since Providence apparently took a hand in it now and then, must certainly be played with the skill of which all her coquetries were part and lot. Better than chess—at which she excelled strangely for a mere girl—better than any spherulic harmony or ravishment of beauty, was that game to Anne, and every one of her accomplishments a move in it. Continuing her thoughts aloud she said to Simonette as they rode slowly along the winding river-bank of the Strand in London:

“I bless our Lady that Mary’s folly has set a beacon-light for me. I can well believe that the King’s fancy was a heavy draught for a fool like her to swallow. Indeed I think she has been a little drunk ever since. Now, supposing the case mine instead of hers, what should I have done?”

“Protested virtue and fled to Hever Castle!” said Simonette briefly. “The King’s Majesty cannot bear to be balked and the price rises with every disappointment. Had Mademoiselle Mary done this she could have taken a peerage and what wealth she would. And then, a king’s love is no stain! Look at his natural son, Henry Fitzroy Duke of Richmond. Who blames the

mother? But Mademoiselle Mary—a *fille-de-chambre* could not have been so foolish! No wonder she is ridiculed.”

Anne reined in her horse and stood looking westward for a few minutes at the late afternoon sun upon the wide river. A beautiful sight. Above the dazzle rose the noble town mansions of the nobility such as Durham House, Suffolk House, York House—Cardinal Wolsey’s new and splendid London palace,—and the like. Looking eastward, grim against the pale eastern sky rose the grim daughter-towers, of the Tower of London brooding over the darkening river—unalterably a fortress and a prison, showing no sign of the splendours of the royal residence hidden in its evil heart.

“I wonder the King and Queen can satisfy themselves to live there,” she said, pointing with her riding-whip. “Men say it is full of crawling ghosts. Ugh!—the torture chambers and the rat-eaten prisoners! How can she bear it!”

“What matter!” said Simonette contemptuously. “She is Queen of England. Why should she think of such miserales? For my part I think the Tower grander than any of these new-built Western houses. Only the royal people can live *there*, but Cardinal Wolsey—son of the butcher of Ipswich!—can stick up York House and take his low-born pleasure in it. The wallowing glutton!”

“Pretty well for a little Frenchwoman to turn up her nose at a great Prince of the Church like Cardinal Wolsey! They say he steers the King as I steer this horse with the reins. I solemnly believe, Simonette, that you fear neither God, man, nor devil!”

Simonette laughed also.

“Well, but the Cardinal! Look at his luxury, his gluttony for gold, his natural children—Holy Peter! how is any woman to respect him! But she may learn from him! That man by his wits has pulled himself up from the bloody mire of the slaughter-house, and some day he will be Pope and kings will kiss the cross on his slipper. Already he says ‘I and my King’ when he speaks of King Henry.”

Anne turned her horse’s head westward again and rode slowly on.

“And what lesson in that for a woman, Mademoiselle Wiseacre? I aspire to no Popedom.”

“The lesson that brains not only make kings and cardinals but use them and unmake them. O, go cautiously, Anne of my heart! My only fear is lest your own coquetries dazzle you. You do not know how conquering you are. You do not see how your spells fly like a noose about men’s necks—and

believe me it is as cheap to noose a king as a ploughboy. If Mademoiselle Mary could——” She stopped. “I talk too fast,” she said.

Anne looked into the west:

“So you would have me set my new green velvet cap at the King!” she answered. “But no, Simonette! I mock at Mary for a green gosling but am one myself. You laugh, but I tell you I go to school here in London, and I shall learn from one and all. From the dull heavy Queen of England, from every successful woman and every man that takes a second look at me. And when I have finished schooling I shall consider England and——what? Win the Cardinal’s heart and rule the King with him?”

“Or without him,” said Simonette dryly. “And look——here comes your father riding with his men to meet you.”

Sir Thomas, lean and grim, with nose and chin that promised a keen sense of money values, welcomed his daughter with sufficient warmth as they met by Durham House where he was staying at the time and whence they would embark next day for Greenwich Palace and the Court. He was seriously out of love with daughters and their affairs, owing to Mary’s eclipse and the discredit her folly had brought him, and he made it very plain to Anne in their first ten minutes alone in her chamber at Durham House that he had by no means gone to the expense of a Court wardrobe for her that she might find life more amusing than at Blickling Hall or Hever Castle.

“Indeed no!” he said crustily. “What lies before you is to marry yourself well and hold patronage in your hand for those of us that need a helping hand, which God knows George and Mary most sorely do, and I myself could do with. You are now most honourably placed. Your fellow maids of honour are noble and honourable young women. You are therefore in company beyond your deserts and——”

“Sir, are they beautiful?” Anne asked eagerly.

“Folly!—toys! Beautiful? Mostly fair-cheeked yellow-haired English girls, and a Spaniard or two. Girls men love to marry, kind and simple. Take example!”

“Sir, my sister Mary is kind and simple,” said Anne, adjusting her short cape of tawny velvet about her shoulders.

Sir Thomas looked at her sharply.

“She is a born fool and will meet her just reward. Do better! And now——there is a young man at Court to whom all the Boleyns should show courtesy, for he is one can give them a lift up the ladder, and we have not got

so far but what we might go further. And that is my Lord Percy whom you saw at Hever, son and heir to the Earl of Northumberland. My Lord of Northumberland is a man proud of his birth and state but cringing enough to those higher than himself, of whom there are few, for the Percys go back to Father Noah, if not further. And he has put his son about the Cardinal to learn statecraft. Show him a sweet but not a seeking civility. The son is young and eager. Meet him with wisdom. Keep good terms with all the maids your companions—women’s tongues stab deep as steel. Make your court to my Lord Cardinal—he is the greatest man in England but has a kindness for a pretty face. And for two last precepts: Remember rich friends are as easy to make as poor hangers-on and do not waste your time on idle fellows like Thomas Wyatt. Also, trust none at Court. Each has his or her market to make and will trouble yours if they can.”

She listened dutifully, then asked a question very like herself:

“Sir, do you see anything in my looks to give me an advantage at Court? I do not ask from vanity but because in France I had reason to think they did. But England may be different.”

He looked at her for the first time in his life as on merchandise to be very carefully appraised before it comes to sale. She stood facing him with a beautiful glow rising in her cheeks, her head held gallantly, the yellow sparkle afire in her eyes. Her figure was not come to full maturity, but the delicate youth of the bosom and slender body was grace itself, culminating in the swan-like dignity of her throat. She wore a tawny velvet riding-dress laced and corded with dull gold that made a lustrous background for a brilliant picture, and Sir Thomas looked at her as one taken by surprise, for it seemed she had suddenly expanded from young maidenhood to womanhood in his absence.

He viewed her cautiously and replied with grudging dignity:

“I will not deny that you can challenge rivalry, but yet there are fair rivals at Court. Set more store therefore on your singing—for indeed you have a noble instrument in your voice and a choice hand for lute, virginals, and regals. Also you have a quick and pleasant wit, and the hussy Simonette has trained you well in French—and, I trust in heaven, nothing worse. If I mistake not she has a go-between’s eye. Do not trust her too far. And remember this, if you get into mischief, Mistress Anne, I will whip you with my own hand till the blood runs. And now go your way with my blessing and God’s.”

She bent her knee to receive it with the carelessness of custom and went off to rest and to whisper with Simonette.

At the same hour next day she stood in the presence of Queen Katharine, born a princess of Spain and of the noblest blood in Europe, wife to the eighth Henry of England, mother of a girl who was now the only and slowly slipping hold on the heart of her husband—a woman therefore who had great perils to face and knew it. Anne, knowing it also, and the more keenly as Mary's sister, trembled a little as she was ushered into the stately room where Katharine of Aragon sat with a few of her ladies and stitched at a wide broidery frame holding a design from some Italian original of my Lady April advancing through a rainbow with her nymphs scattering flowers. Anne's heart beat a little quickly as she saw this very great lady who held so much patronage and power in her hands, who had apparently met and dismissed Mary as serenely from her life as if she had been an intruding insect. But she knew too much of queens and courts not to guess that that royal heart might beat a little quicker as she sedately followed her guide and her name was given by Elizabeth Hammond—a favourite lady—as “Mistress Anne Boleyn—may it please your Grace.”

It could not be surprising. At first sight everyone must see the likeness between herself and Mary, though all disowned it later. For a horrid moment the near-sighted Queen thought she saw that unfortunate advancing. The impression fled instantly before Anne's grace and composure, but it had been, and coloured with a little remoteness the gentle dignity with which Katharine extended her hand to be kissed while Anne went on her knees.

Her speech was very brief—a word of the pleasure with which she welcomed a young lady who had been dear to the good Queen Claude of France, and whose experience of the most elegant of foreign courts must make her a very welcome and distinguished companion to the ladies of the English Court.

“And also your beautiful French speaking of which report has reached us will be very acceptable often, and especially when you speak with my daughter the Princess Mary—who needs practice in that tongue.”

Enquiries easily answered followed as to the French queens and their customs, and then Anne, sliding into the background, was accommodated with a kind of joint-stool among the others. In France she had learnt to stand for uncomplaining hours, but Queen Katharine, in spite of the stiff servility required by the parvenu Tudors who had supplanted the royal Plantagenets, was more humane, and in her presence even the younger women were invited to sit unless on formal occasions. The talk, Anne decided, was dull and virtuous. She wondered how the King or any man endured it. Even a mass might be a covetable variation. She dared not begin any talk herself,

however low-voiced, among the other ladies, and sat stiff as a ramrod, allowing to herself that the prizes at Court must be wealthy indeed if bought at the price of such boredom. She thought of the fine sparkle of the Louvre and the Tuileries—and the castles of the Loire and gay women and men responsive as the echo to the voice, and looked at Katharine's serene face and gently moving lips and sighed. What chance had the Queen of holding her husband? Little enough if the green gosling Mary could disturb her peace!

Wyatt was right. Queen Katharine was massive but carried it with stateliness, so that many thought it comely and suited to her station. Her hair was still beautiful—rich polished auburn like a chestnut fresh from the pod and banded smoothly under a stiff architectural-looking five-pointed cap of black velvet edged with jewels. It vaguely reminded Anne of a Gothic cathedral door—and nothing could have been more unbecoming to Katharine's high forehead and rather heavy features. Her dress was of splendid royal blue velvet, and about her neck and girdling her waist she wore magnificent clusters of rubies linked in a Moorish design by strings of pearls. Certainly a queenly figure, Anne decided in her quick incisive way, but with no light feet to run after any man's wandering heart if fairer opportunities drew him to pursuit. Of course her position as queen was as secure as destiny could make it. So great a lady of unspotted fame and guarded with the respect of all the world could never be disturbed in her pride of place whoever might amuse the King for an idle hour. Besides, as Anne suddenly remembered, there was her nephew, the Emperor Charles—what need this Queen of England care for a husband's infidelity? Well might she look as tranquil as if no disturbance could ripple her calm!

There was a sound of loud laughing in the ante-chamber. Queen Katharine dropped her needle. A man's and a woman's. The velvet curtain was dashed aside, and in rushed a young woman, breathless and half exhausted with laughing. She ran to the Queen and threw herself on her knees before her and gasped out, choking with merriment:

“Protect me, your Grace—whom should I run to but you? The King's highness has hunted me from the Painted Chamber to black my face for the masquerade tonight, I may be an Ethiop Queen but I was once Queen of France and none—not even he—shall black me. I hid from him.”

There was a little flutter among the ladies, and Anne craned forward as far as she dared to see the King's sister Mary (now Duchess of Suffolk), to whom she had once been maid of honour. Would she remember her? Dared she thrust herself into notice? The pretty, slim young girl was a little

overblown now, ruddy where she had been pink and white, but still gamesome and young for her age, as she had always been. A big romp, in reality. Katharine, stooping laughing above her, looked old and faded against the plump floridity.

“Hide me! hide me! here he comes!” she cried and slipped in a moment behind the Queen’s chair to the tune of shouts and laughter outside. Again the curtain was dashed away, and in burst Henry with a painter’s brush in his hand dropping with black paint.

“The little vixen! Where is she? She near scratched my face!” he shouted. “Where is she? She dared me to it. Have her out!”

Every woman present including the Queen rose to her feet, though all were tittering demurely. That was a point of manners, for if the King loved practical jokes all must bear a hand. But while Anne’s lips were doing their duty her eyes were riveted on the man who did not see her, Sir Stephen Lloyd.

Why had she not thought him remarkable at Hever? Florid, too large and full his face might be,—his body certainly was—but heavens, what a resolute jaw and what a fine careless libertine of a man, for all his size and puffed eyes made him look older than his thirty-five years! The French King was fine and finikin beside him. Mary’s tears had watered the false King but not the false lover—yet even as a lover the man could not be despicable, especially if one propped the notion with the certitude of his royalty. She began to think Mary a little less contemptible than hitherto. No—it would not be easy to bargain with him! That geniality might grow hard, threatening, brutal, in a moment, those full lips and square white teeth might blurt out words very difficult for a woman to meet unshrinking. Could he be mastered? Was he faithless as his grandfather the fourth Edward, whose name was a byword with women?

Some lady pointed a sly little finger behind the Queen’s chair, and he darted at it and dragged out the Queen-Duchess screaming at the top of her voice. With the quick pat of a cat’s claw she snatched the brush from him and made a dab at his face, clotting a corner of his golden beard with black. He shook her like a rat, but merrily, and all her golden hair broke from her stiff coif and flowed about her—the pair of them as handsome and buxum as a Rubens version of Mars and Venus at their pranks on Olympus. He let her go and threw himself into a chair, roaring with laughter.

“I forgive you, minx, because you are growing too old to be blacked now you have minxes of your own. May they not grow up to be as saucy! Now

sit yourself down and behave like a lady. I see a new face in my wife's following. A shocked face too!"

The Queen-Duchess, Mary Tudor, bunching up her sheaves of tumbled hair, looked about her. Her eye fell on Anne doubtfully effacing herself, and she stepped straight forward with outstretched hand.

"Why, is it little Anne Boleyn whose prudery I am shocking? Not she! She is a minx herself! Anne, do you not remember our trip to Paris and you in red velvet and white fur and——Our Lady!—how you are grown!"

Anne kissed her hand, conscious that the friendly recognition might be important, and murmured that at fourteen she was not come to her full growth.

"No—nor I to my full flesh! I was a slip of a thing then, but children bring flesh, and there will be more of me than I want or my lord Duke either. If you come to the masquerade tonight you shall see me as a queen again but a black-faced one this time—though not with the painter's brush."

She turned from Anne laughing and apparently forgot her. That was the Tudor way—a genial little blaze of friendliness and then cold ash. It was characteristic that this was the first and last time the Queen-Duchess spoke to Anne during her novitiate as maid of honour. Later she spoke—for reasons—and very differently.

But the King's eye had fixed on the stranger.

"Sure I saw you at Hever, mistress," he said. "And afterwards Thomas Wyatt told me you sang handsomely. Well, you are welcome to our poor house of Greenwich!"

He spoke with a kind of carelessness that would not advance her consequence, and a little angry flame lit in her heart. But it was not wonderful. Again that unlucky Mary's phantom might intrude, and she had at least the satisfaction to know that his eye was on her, and though he hid it well for a man, trust a woman to know it! He was guessing, she thought, as men will, how far the likeness to an old love might go. The Queen was watching him too with the same thought—a wife's. Anne made herself very demure and silent. Modesty fell about her like a veil, and she was mute at the reference to her singing. About as much grace as Mary, he thought, in spite of her Court training,—and that was saying little. Well—enough is as good as a feast, and this young woman would not interest him. Let the Queen have her! But he wondered how much she knew—what details were given to or kept from a young woman of family by judicious or injudicious parents. What would Mary herself tell her sister? Hitherto, in spite of Hever,

he had scarcely realized her existence. Now she was on the map—a dark-eyed thing, shy, and perhaps disliking him because of Mary. It really was his duty to look up some husband for Mary!

The Queen-Duchess, having remembered and forgotten her, tossed her corn-gold locks, went off with Elizabeth Hammond, and Queen Katharine broke up the little assembly. The King stayed with her, and as Anne meekly followed the rest she saw him lounging from his chair close to the Queen's, his big arm thrust about her with easy good-nature.

“Letters from Spain, good Kate!” she heard him say, and then the curtain fell on this sweet domesticity.

So these were the manners of the English Court! Never in her experience had she seen a French king or nobleman put his arm about his wife or any other woman in public—never a kiss or a scuffle. She thought this intimacy boorish. She would have to drill her manners to a new tune and show no surprise if wooing took the form of snatching and romping. She decided that these islanders from the King down needed a lesson in manners. They would not find them less wicked but certainly more amusing. The animal allure of sex can be heightened with a hundred pretty tricks on both sides of which this court apparently knew nothing. How often had she heard them mocked in France for English swine, and her own greatest blossom of compliment had been:

“But you, mademoiselle—you are French. No—do not tell me! Was the excellent Lady Elizabeth de Boleyn—was your lovely mother never in France?”

She said all this to George when he came up for a day to bring some belongings of hers left at Hever and to take a little pleasure of his own on the way.

“Shall I be able to eat this half-baked dough after the French pastry? I long for Paris. O—if I had wings like a dove it is there, there, I would fly! This dull dirty smoky London—these heavy over-jewelled women and rollicking men, smelling of taverns. And mass, mass, eternal masses with the Queen! If heaven is like the English Court give me the other! You came to see me in Paris. You know.”

George Boleyn knew and owned it. He too liked the fine flavour of life in Paris. Speaking French as well as Anne—and Simonette—always good-natured—could have given a part of the reason—Frenchwomen were much to his taste. Even more so than the black-eyed Italians he had met in Rome. But he had considerations to urge.

“Most true, my poor Anne. But yet—though you shone like a star in Paris—it was not a star that glittered gold. Frenchmen will have a dowry to match their breeding, while an Englishman runs mad in love like a bull in season and seldom asks to count the coins in his love’s pocket. You will do better here in spite of Brantôme.”

But Anne sat sad—remembering the past. Still is to be read what Brantôme, the young French poet, wrote of the lovely Englishwoman. A poet, you will say, but a French poet is not often caught by a foreigner’s graces.

She had a great talent for poetry and when she sang, like a second Orpheus she would have made bears and wolves attentive.

(“But not Englishmen!” had Anne said mournfully in reading her tribute.)

She also danced the English dances, springing and gliding with infinite grace and agility. And she invented many new figures and steps which yet are called by her name or those of the gallant partners with whom she danced them. She was brilliant in all games fashionable at courts. Besides singing like a siren accompanying herself on the lute, she harped better than King David.

(“But not to the same tune!” had George put in.)

She dressed with exquisite taste and invented new fashions which were followed by the fairest ladies of the French Court. But none wore them with her grace, in which she rivalled Venus.

This praise was a family jest with the Boleyns, who mostly hid their pride with laughter, and if George quoted a sentence of it now it was to point the moral that in spite of all this—in spite even of the admiration of King Francis, which she evaded with more skill than Mary with her own sovereign, Anne Boleyn had remained Anne Boleyn still.

“But cheer up. Sadness never suits your looks,” he added. “And here is Wyatt under the window with a gentleman well worth your consideration and whom you did not find amiss at Hever. My Lord Percy. That man is such a lover of music that if you tickle his ears you can lead him by the nose.”

She pressed up to the casement to see. Yes, she remembered that dark face—lean though so young—and the nervous quick glances he cast at Wyatt. Wyatt walked slowly. The Percys were Percys, and he had no mind to please Anne's aristocratic tastes where men were concerned. He had noted—what did he not note where she was concerned?—how Percy had watched her. He could have counted the heartbeats in that last kiss pressed on her cheek. Customs are customs, but Wyatt thought that kissing custom too free.

So in they came, and even as they came verses of reproach to Anne were shaping in his head. Not yet—for it might start the notion in hers,—but later, he would pour them out before her. Did he believe in her at all? Did he trust her or did he not? That question he dared not even put to himself. He had certainly never answered it.

A man who had seen Anne in the royal chamber could not have known her. The jewel released from the darkness sparkled, and Percy stared open-mouthed. At Hever she had been desirable. Here she was adorable—a witch, a sorceress scattering charms as a rose scatters petals. George sat and smiled content.

She sang a quick French song with a tremble of laughter in it and a girl escaping from a kiss. Percy's slowly expanding smile followed the little jest. She would not sing more—let men leave off with an appetite! Then they talked of the King.

“An excellent musician, a great horseman. Truly a most accomplished prince. Devout also. On days when he goes to the chase he hears mass three times, but a hunting-mass, as you will understand, Mistress Anne—somewhat jumbled and run into one. I have known him hear five masses in one day.”

And much more to the same strain.

Anne listened and reflected and believed she knew better. That burly figure, those blue eyes and moist lips did not bespeak the devotee! And what amusement had the poor man now the flaming days of the Field of the Cloth of Gold were over and middle age coming on with a gouty shoe? George had said and Wyatt sworn and Percy corroborated that except for drinking and gambling the Court was dull as ditch water. The King had certain “musicianers” but the Queen turned them chiefly to pious uses and their voices ascended in heavenly carols and psalms. She sifted Percy with practised skill and when he left, asking humbly for leave to come again, she knew much more of the Court than when he entered. After George and she discussed it she retailed it all to Simonette, who listened silently. She would not yet tell all her thoughts or knowledge to Anne. Train a young dog to the

chase, break in a young horse by easy steps. She knew something rash to recklessness in Anne which needed caution in the trainer. Therefore she spoke of Percy.

There it was safe to urge. As for the King—Simonette smiled in thinking of her knowledge. A born pagan—like Anne herself—a follower of Pan and the satyrs, a lover of red wine in golden cups and plenteous high-flavoured meats in huge silver dishes. That he had a vein of superstition in him which courtiers called religion she did not deny, but it would give way at any moment to lust or policy or ambition—and Simonette knew—what did she not know?—that the Queen strummed on that string to breaking—a foolish woman who did not know her day was done and bestir herself to find new pleasures for her master.

“A wise woman,” said Simonette, stitching at Anne’s new frontlet of silver rimmed with pearls of her mother’s lent but not given by her father, “chooses amusements for her husband and so makes him her debtor. But this the Queen does not do. I hear she turns pale and clutches her heart if he looks twice at a girl. Now a woman who wished to make her way at Court and gain the help of both King and Queen in a handsome marriage would help the Queen to amuse the King in all honour. And let me tell you, Anne, that what you did in France you can do here and earn great thanks and more praise than ever Brantôme gave you, my lady! He was a fool to let you see it!”

Anne sat in thoughtful silence.

Chapter Four

Now, with Simonette always at her elbow sleeping in a little dog's closet that opened from her own narrow room, Anne began life anew. George was in London living in the great rambling house of the Duke of Norfolk their uncle, neither welcome nor unwelcome, for what with the Duke's hangers-on, retainers, and a goodly body of men-at-arms it was more like a great hostelry than anything more civilized, and it is likely my lord Duke would never have known George was boarding and bedding there if my lady Duchess, the Duke's chattering godless old mother, had not brought it out one day at a venture.

The Duke digested it a moment—an acid shrewd black-headed man none too fond of his sister's match and the Boleyns—and then said—"Let him stay so long as I do not tumble over him," and so went his way. The old Duchess did not add, for she did not know, that Thomas Wyatt was as good as quartered on them too, though he nominally lived at the great Cardinal's at York House. His very eminent Eminence also kept open house and his table was sumptuous. None of your mere beefs and muttuns, except for the men-at-arms, but turkeys, pullets, swans, peacocks, game, and venison, and such fish for fast days that it made them a feast. George himself often dined at the lower end of the great board tables unknown to his Sanctity. He liked this because Percy was in constant attendance on the Cardinal and because his uncle's housekeeping was rough and ready though plentiful, and George, like Anne, had a dainty palate and the best of everything was good enough for him. They both craved choice dishes stimulating to the appetite and washed down with the bottled wines of Bordeaux and Burgundy creaming in the silver cups. Choice in everything, they were youthful epicures and made it a part of their philosophy. Anne had reason for these tender regrets. At the English Court the Queen's maids were rationed like soldiers. To each, for breakfast, a manchet of bread, a loaf, and a chine of beef, seethed or roast, and a gallon of hop-less ale. Plentiful certainly, though Simonette and her dog (if she had one) must live off it too. But horribly monotonous, and the fish on fast days anything but luxurious. She pined for the vegetables and salads and fruit of Hever and Blickling—for Lady Boleyn's marmaletts of

quince and plum, and wrote beseeching letters for boxes of these good things when the next serving man should be posting up to London. Out of sight, out of mind, and she would not have got them but that George, lounging by while she wrote, suggested she should ask for the luxuries on the ground that they could make their court to the Queen and Cardinal with such little gifts from the country.

“It will cost little and go far,” he said.

Boxes came riding pillion after that, and the pair ate plentifully and gave sparingly but yet to good advantage. It was a part of their campaign which they advanced with the utmost caution and modesty. As a man switches off the tallest dandelion-heads with his cane in passing, so also at Court—a head too soon exalted, too tender in the stem, bears the brunt.

Meanwhile Anne with Simonette’s help amassed details of the position of every person worth considering at Court, and George’s contributions were not negligible.

The King, supreme, ruddy, golden, exacting all honour due to the Queen and treating her loyally so far as kings’ codes go. Mistresses he had of the come-and-go sort, even more fleeting than poor Mary. But none that counted, none that could not be paid off with jewels and a purse. Such revels were conducted at Jericho—a house in the country devoted to his pleasures and with which the Queen need not and did not concern herself, for neither Jericho nor the ladies of Jericho ever came between the wind and her nobility. Could the odd name of his pleasure house have given rise to an English objurgation still surviving? At all events, to go to Jericho was the mark of an intimate, and George pined for an invitation. He made court himself to young Norris, a gentleman distinguished by the King’s liking, and his descriptions warmed his fancy. He was much with Anne and George then, and more later.

“As to the house itself—no very great thing!” he told them one evening when in Anne’s sitting-room they sat to wine and music in which he delighted. “Still, a good house where even a king may stretch his legs in comfort, and the gardens with a big wall about them to keep out peepers;—very pleasant!”

“Great merriment there, I swear!” said George taking his wine soberly. The chestnut-haired young Norris, with his cherry-cordial complexion more like a girl than a boy, considered that question.

“Why, yes—and no. Like this, his Grace will not have low-born musicians and singers there nor French dancers, and above all no women-servants for, reason good! he will not have tattling. So it is only his trusted

few and such servants as the rack would not wring a word from that go there. Now, though I love music and could listen all ears, I have a voice like a sea gull except in a chorus, and his Grace heard me once and threw the lute at my head, laughing fit to burst. Carew pipes a bit and Seymour can turn a drinking song, and when it comes to a rousing chorus we can make ourselves heard, but, Lord, what is it? And the worst is the King loves good singing! Then, as for dancing—the women at Jericho are pretty enough—that's their livelihood. But dancing with delicate leaps and swimming and wreathing— No—no! I will not promise you, George, that you will find Jericho amusing. Nor does the King. He goes for a day here and there, but the wenches weary him, and he comes back to be faithful to the Queen and play with the little Princess Mary and govern Europe—or try to—with Wolsey. Sure the Court is dull enough! Eh, Mistress Anne?"

"I have seen gayer!" she said demurely,—“but to live under the shadow of such a King and Queen is great joy. Does not the King's sister—the Duchess of Suffolk—head the revels? She was gay enough when I went as her maid of honour to France when she married her old French King on condition she might wed where she pleased when he died.”

Norris shook his cherubic head solemnly.

“Why, yes—if she came often to Court; but she does not come often. The King mislikes her choice of Suffolk, and though he pulls her about sometimes he does not trust her. And Queen Katharine is no reveller, and though the Cardinal gives the King fine lewd entertainments when he visits him, a priest cannot catch the French note of gaiety that the King loves. The truth is—I speak it among friends—his Grace, ever since he knew the French King Francis, wants a court like his, all pleasure and grace and pretty mockery and wit, and I ask you—how can he get it with two such mountains as the Queen and the Cardinal in his way? Mind you, both, his Grace is no frivoller. His great game is Europe, and that is why the Cardinal leads him by the nose,—Ahem!—I mean to say—is valued for his counsel—but he wants pretty ladies and gay men and music and dancing to unbend with.”

“There was never a truer word spoken!” said a new voice entering, and the three in conclave started and turned round. It was Percy, more eager and lantern-jawed than ever. If loss of flesh be the mark of a lover he certainly wore Anne's collar. He had haunted her like a bee a balsam-bed since she was at Court, and though he had made no formal revelation, yet she knew him hers. Now he frequented her room and slipped as naturally into their consultations as Norris or Sir Francis Weston—whom he announced as well

on his way. He dropped into a velvet armchair by Anne and went on, playing with the bullion fringe with nervous fingers.

“The King wants a new world—like all the gorgeous luxury of Rome, the delicate gaieties of France! He would leave Jericho to the rats and owls tomorrow if he could get it at Court. But that is impossible.”

“And why?” asked Anne, leaning her cheek thoughtfully on her hand. “Sure it is our duty to amuse the King between his works for all our good! When George came to see me in France we had two masques;—George, you remember?—One was the Harvest Masque, wheat and grape gathering. First the wheat. I invented the dances. I taught the lords and ladies, and I was Ceres—a very rustic Ceres who danced and made love. Now, the Queen would sell her richest pearls—anything but her daughter and her soul—to keep his Grace amused and happy. I have sat as demure as a mouse seeing him yawn and yawn and her face sadden, and at last he falls asleep heavy with wine and the water stands in her eyes and she says her prayers to herself until we are released to bed! It is not for me to praise myself, but if all of you would help me, with a whisk of my wand—and that reminds me—Oberon and Titania too!—O, there is no end——”

She was lovely with smiles and sparkles as she spoke, leaning forward. Under the fall of the velvet cloth Percy caught and held her hand, and she did not release it.

“But who will speak for me to the Queen? Who will tell her I managed the revels in France? Who? Who?” she cried.

“I,” said Percy manfully. “She loves my mother and doesn’t hate me. The Queen shall entertain his Grace to a masque if that is the will of her Majesty Queen Anne—Queen Ceres—Queen Titania!”

There was a great hand-clapping. Norris ran off for Wyatt, Sir Francis Weston, and Mark Smeaton. Women were the difficulty. As Anne objected, they were such loutish dancers. But she thought her cousin Madge Skelton, a cousin of her own and one of the Queen’s girls, might serve if well drilled. And what did George and Percy think of Anne Weston? She was a pretty fair-haired thing, and he must consider her because of the great Moresby acres in Cumberland and she was so madly in love with her husband that she might make trouble with her tears if she were left out and he shepherding lovely garlanded shepherdesses! Could they have a few real sheep, washed and curled and perfumed? They had done this at the Louvre.

In trooped Norris and the others. If Anne was the Venus of the Court, though not yet so acknowledged, Sir Francis was certainly the Adonis. A more beautiful young man never stepped—a brown man, blue-eyed, gallant,

and fine as a sword sheathed in gold and steel, too proud of his beauty to hide it, too proud of his amours with women to doubt or account them, the very glass of such fashion as the English Court provided, but owning his teachers in George and Anne with their French elegance. Wyatt came because Anne must have him, but doubtfully. He was not yet on sure feet at Court, and his verses had made no way for him. At their heels came Mark Smeaton—a low-browed full-lipped sensual fellow with the eyes that light and blaze when music strikes fire from them, ugly to look at so far as face goes, a goatish masque enough, but the finest figure of them all and a most finished dancer, narrow-eyed and humorous.

There were not chairs enough to go round, and Percy perched on the table at Anne's right hand, and Sir Francis on the great arm of her chair. The rest where they could and Mark Smeaton on the ground with his knees to his chin and his arms about them, his eyes full-fixed on Anne. George was Apollo, undoubtedly, shining, quick, adroit, the arrow on the bowstring always, but Diana, Queen and Huntress—huntress indeed!—was mistress of the night—and no master.

She sketched the Harvest Masque swiftly. They would have real shocks of wheat in the great hall at Greenwich Palace and a few sheep, because, though sheep do not occur in harvest fields—her country breeding taught her that!—it would give occasion for lovely shepherds and shepherdesses hidden in pairs behind the corn-shocks. There must be a Queen of the Revels—and that must not be herself. No—*no*, she replied to the storm of protests. It would be arrogant, unseemly, it would be taking too much upon herself. Then what would she do? all questioned.

George and she would dance the Harvest Courtship dance.

"I invented it and I would not dance it with any but my brother—it is so amorous," she said with a brown sidelong glance at Percy and a succeeding twinkle at Sir Francis. "And he and I will sing our duo, 'Sweet Colinette, give way to love!' and Mark accompany it on a harpsichord hid behind a wheat-shock. And Mark shall dance a *pas seul* as the Merry Shepherd full of wine and then catch one of the women and make her dance against her will. And—O, well!—places for all of you to shine! Norris shall be young Corydon—his cherub face suits it. But it is the women bewilder me. Every one of them must be pretty and have shapely legs and pretty feet, and—what is far harder to come by—brains and voices. We want eight couples. Sir Francis, what of your wife?"

He made the faintest possible flicker of grimace, then said gravely:

“For the legs I can vouch, and all know her pretty face. For neither brains nor voice will I be answerable. But I can promise she shall take her part. What of Madge Skelton?”

Anne looked sharply at him. She suspected a *tendresse* there. But what then? Every Jack had his Jill at Court, and if it were not one it would be another.

“Madge would do,” she said amiably: “a fine saucy brunette with the eyes that tell and lips and bust that asks a tight corsage, and a waist you can circle with your thumbs and fingers. That is the French style, and the French is the world’s fashion and not stuffy old England lumbering a century behind. But, listen, gentlemen,—who is to be our chief woman? I will not be. I say the Duchess of Suffolk—the King’s sister. For her legs I can answer, and like his Grace she has a true taste in music. Her golden hair wreathed first with wheat—then with grapes. And we will end with a masque of the Four Seasons. O my heart!—I shall think I am in *la France chérie* again!”

Loud applause. They all drew together, settling details—a band of intimate friends. Not one but called the others familiarly by their names. Anne and George were George and Anne to all. Even low-born Smeaton was Mark among these new-fashioned gentry. He would have brushed their fathers’ coats. With them he laughed and jested.

“Art makes all equal!” said Anne magnificently, and George added:

“It is the true Republic.”

They drank much wine on it and ate the delicate little cakes and comfits which were fashionably served in the evenings, and then Mark went to Anne’s virginals and sang a song of moonlight and warm loves and dawns that come too soon—too soon, and his voice was manliest music, and she drooped aside in her chair and palpitated to the words and melody—a mere vehicle of delight. O would, would that Percy could thus move her! And all sat spellbound, for indeed the man’s voice was a glory that irradiated the heart, and his goatish masque took on such ancient wisdom of love and nature and the rushing sap of spring in man and beast that it became a grotesque beauty interpreting every man’s nature to himself even as the winds of Spring whisper it and the warmth of the beloved in close encircling arms. The cold intellectualism of Anne and George melted like ice in summer seas under that music, and they swayed in it, flowers that have no will but the wind’s, listening, dreaming, responsive.

“No!” cried Percy, breaking the spell. “It is lovely—but lascivious music, Mark. You stir the dregs of a man’s nature. Give us something cool

and fresh before we separate, lest we toss and love all night.”

He rippled the keys under most skilful fingers, saying:

“The lute for love! I could have moved you indeed with that. But this keyed thing serves well for an *aubade*—a song of dawn. Hark—the lark! Come sing, come sing, Anne! Not I! Come sing!”

She ran to the virginals and standing beside him with a slim hand on his shoulder, waited until the ripples reached high-water mark, then threw her voice in among them, weaving and interweaving, mounting celestially to heaven’s gate to bring the news that earth had gladdened with the sun. Mark bent to it. His hands wove silver threads to make ladders for the silver climbing voice. O lovely—lovelier! She ended on a sweet cry of victory, and Mark’s hands dropped, and they stood a second, and she turned, flushed and laughing. A pause, and the men hurt their hands with clapping.

“The King must hear. Must. Shall!” cried Weston. “We will be his minstrels. I go tomorrow to the Duchess. Success! Success!”

They had had enough wine, but they had more and sat talking late into the night. Then Anne betook herself to Simonette and the wisdom of her counsels.

So these young people made music and masques and did not know that they were making history. The Pope on the Rock of St. Peter might have trembled in far-off Rome; the Emperor have sat with knitted brows and stormy frown thinking of Anne’s Colin and Colinette. Even the headsman in the cold Tower of London might have looked at his axe and smiled in thinking of those sheep at play among the wheat-shocks. But the gay present out-laughs the veiled future, and next day Percy having besought an audience went to the Queen.

She sat in a small cabinet under a window of painted glass, and a very young girl with her seated—the other lady standing behind her chair. Percy knew them both. The seated child was the Princess Mary of England, nine years of age, and heiress to the Crown, betrothed to Charles—the high and mighty Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire and her first cousin. A very great young lady therefore, and had her beauty been as great as her position might have set the world aflame. This was not so, however. Her childish complexion was lovely, milk-white and rose—an inheritance from her beautiful grandmother Elizabeth of York who had wedded the White Rose to her grandfather’s Red Rose of Lancaster. Her brow was pure and fair also, and her dark grey eyes reflective and calm but somewhat wide apart for beauty, and her nose drew up an over-long upper lip, though the mouth was mobile and sensitive. She was commended for beauty—but royalty might

play its part in the commendation, though certainly her very slim little figure deserved praise. But what all thinking men would have agreed upon was the open honesty of the face and the air of kindness and sincerity that breathed in every uncertain movement and glance—uncertain because she was so terribly short-sighted that to her men moved like trees (as the Bible says) and she peered rather than looked at things and persons. Like her mother her hair was auburn—there one recognized the noble Visigoth blood of Spain; and like her mother she had, even though a child, the manner and look of birth so high that they had no need to assert themselves and cannot imagine that such a need can ever occur. Set the Princess Mary in a crowd of richly dressed ladies, beautiful and imposing, let her move forward with her short-sighted step, her face a little questioning, as it must be with those who see the world dimly, and any man of the world must say “The King’s daughter.” It was the perfect simplicity of highest breeding.

The lady standing behind the Queen’s seat was a dark handsome Spaniard who having come to England with the Queen had made herself so far at home as to marry the English Mountjoy. Percy bowed to his knees; the Queen, worn and patient with her long dyspeptic agonies, tendered a gracious hand which he kissed and, still on his knees, kissed also the hand of the young Princess. He remained kneeling until the Queen, having asked affectionately after his mother, bid him sit. He compromised on standing; the little joint-stool offered having little to recommend it but its exclusiveness. Percy was liked by mother and daughter—so true to one another that where one liked the other must give her allegiance, and there was an appearance of contented calm and friendliness in the little party of four which took as much from its formality as was possible.

The Queen, plucking a thread from the skein of silk about her neck, went on with her embroidery—a rich design of her own device—pomegranates of Spain on a purple ground, saying mildly:

“And what news of the world do you bring us today, my lord?”

The Princess peered at him with a kind childlike smile. She had observed a silk-wrapped parcel in his hand and thought she guessed its contents. He produced it now and began to unknot with unskilful fingers the ribbons that bound it.

“Why indeed, your Grace,” said he, “it is the humblest offering, but I know the Lady Mary’s grace has a sweet tooth and my mother has discovered a new way to conserve our plums and gages at Alnwick, which are good to begin with. See, madam! she dips them in rich syrup and then in

fine Spanish sugar and they sparkle as in a frost. I have not seen the like elsewhere.”

But he was struggling with the knots, and the Queen said laughing:

“Scissors shall not cut love, and I love your mother. Help him, Mary, my daughter.”

The Princess’s little fingers met his and released the knots deftly. She did it with the perfect friendliness of a child entirely devoid of any sex-consciousness and indeed was always free of that taint or virtue as any nun. Anne would have made a pretty play of it at the least, but Mary was pure of any self-thought. Her nature was running water. Together they unwrapped a hamper of woven rushes gilded, and raising the lid and disclosing row after row of golden plums and green luscious gages all sparkling through the veil of frosty crystal she clapped her hands for pleasure. Plates of the new “porsellan” brought through Turkey from heaven knows what Eastern country were sent for, and the three ladies ate while Percy stood to order with a basin of scented water and a fringed napkin over his arm for royal fingers sticky with sugar.

Thanks and commendations. Then the Queen began:

“The King’s Grace is hunting today, my lord, by Watford. Why are you not with him?”

“Why, for two reasons, madam,” Percy said adroitly. “His Grace did not remember his poor servant, and furthermore I have a device for his royal pleasure which I would first lay before the royal lady from whom all his pleasure flows.”

Very pretty, but the Queen repressed a sigh, and the young Princess looked up anxiously as her mother said in a flat tired voice:

“And that I would be very glad to hear. The King’s Highness needs great relaxation from State matters at which indeed he works with the Cardinal so that I fear his health will break. But we have nothing new, and he does not himself care to masque and dance as he did. I could be very thankful to that man who could invent new pleasures.”

“Then I am that happy man!” Percy said eagerly. “I have a store of pleasures to offer, gracious madam. Your Grace knows that your new maid Mistress Anne Boleyn was maid to two Queens of France—not to mention her service during the brief reign of Princess Mary—now Duchess of Suffolk. She was commended by all these royal ladies for her noble and delicate skill and invention in masques and dances and a kind of acted words which the spectator must guess, and this causes great mirth and merriment.

Also she sings like larks and linnets in spring and has an unrivalled touch on many musical instruments. But it is not so much this as a joyousness and command in which, without putting herself forward,—for she is devoid of pride—she brings men and ladies into concert for singing and dancing until indeed in a jest she was appointed mirthmaker to the French Court, and for innocent harmless pleasantries it was never surpassed nor equalled.”

The Queen looked up from her work interested. The first painful thrill with which she had heard the name of Boleyn had passed away with use, and to her Anne was now simply a handsome dark girl who dressed well and was gracefully quiet in her duties. But something in Percy’s tone made her suspicious with a suspicion which pleased her and would smooth Anne’s way to her end as nothing else could do, for Katharine had excellent reason to doubt radiant faces and charms radiantly displayed.

“My lord, you praise like a lover!” she said with the little smile of a kind middle-aged woman who has a heart to sympathize with young romance. And though Princess Mary could not see the flush that covered his thin face, she could hear the stumble in his voice and smiled too.

“Gracious madam—” he began and halted—“I did not mean so—I am a friend indeed——”

“A friend *indeed!*” said the Queen altering the accent. “Well, but why be ashamed? Young blood will have its course, and I have said to your mother it is time you brought your bride to Alnwick. Surely the young lady is not so hard to please that Alnwick and a Percy cannot content her! You speak among friends, my lord. I will swear these two to secrecy.”

Percy was on his knees again with eager protesting hands. Suddenly he had seen how this friendliness might smooth his way with his parents, with Anne—with everybody.

“Madam—your Grace overwhelms me. Indeed, I think no one like her for beauty and wit and maiden modesty that is more lovely than her face. I trust to your secrecy and her Highness’s and my kind Lady Mountjoy’s and I say I have not dared to ask her though her eyes are kind. Does your Grace think——”

“I? How can I think, lad?” said the Queen kindly. She was wishing this eager young man were her son, had that been possible. There lay her secret anguish, her bosom-fear. They had never had a Queen regnant in England. Elizabeth of York had been rightful Queen, but the throne needed a sword to prop it, and they had married her to Henry of Richmond that her right might set him there. How would it be when Henry the Eighth died if he left no boy to succeed him? Into what hand would England, lying in the Princess Mary’s

lap, fall? For two pins the Queen would have seen her married to a great English nobleman like Percy himself, but if the King and the Cardinal preferred some continental alliance she was helpless. O, if Percy had but been the Prince of Wales telling her his love-tale! But the saints were steel to her prayers.

She banished dreams and resumed her kindness.

“Well—I wish you good speed with my maid, my lord, and you shall have my good word with your parents, and with the Lord Cardinal—who can do more than all. The Boleyns are not of stock as high as your own. Her great-grandfather was a mercer in the city.—I know, for that was brought before me when she desired to be my maid. But her father is an oncoming man, and her mother was Lady Elizabeth Howard, and they call cousin with the Ormonds of Ireland, and that should be high enough even for a Percy. And now tell me of what you young revellers have devised, for I will see your pretty love play her part, and if you incite her to delight the King’s Highness, why I welcome it with a heart and a half. Can we make it a surprise to him?”

Percy poured out his triumphs. All was won. The Queen herself suggested a girl or two and promised her interest with the Duchess of Suffolk as to Queen Ceres. Nothing could have been better. Princess Mary should appear for a moment offering a cornucopia of wheat-ears and poppies to her beautiful aunt.

Let it be judged how he sped away to carry the glorious tidings to Anne.

Chapter Five

HE found Anne alone with Mark Smeaton, she playing on the virginals and Mark leaning over her, threatening to tap the fair fingers with a little ivory stick he carried if she would persist in taking the *tempo* more quickly than his taste approved. Anne, head turned over her shoulder, was looking up at him daring him to anger. Her fingers flew, her eyes shot laughter at the goatish face above her. In a moment, and he knew not why, Percy was certain that he would not have the man making music at Alnwick. That pleasure should be reserved for Anne when they came up to show themselves at Court, and they would not do that too often. What with the factions and cross-currents and intrigues at Court and the despotic temper that all saw growing on the King, it seemed to him that a man might be happy enough in that stately Border castle of the Percys with his broad acres smiling about him and a lovely wife to fleet the hours with her lark's voice and sweet ways. No—not Mark! Sir Francis Weston might come from Moresby Hall with his own pretty Anne and the good Pickerings and Threlkelds and Cliffords gather to great hospitalities, but he would have done with the hidden pitfalls of Court favour and with Mark.

Mark? Why did not the man go? Why did she not bid him go? She could see he was charged with a secret! But no,—they carried on their game, and Mark must sing a horrible French song written by some wretch they called Villon, about men hanged on a tree,—a horrid *macabre* thing that made the flesh creep—he sang it so well—in a whine at first like the wind creaking the gallows, and then with the devil's recklessness. The man was a born actor. Percy listened and shuddered and could not be indifferent, though he tried his best. But if Anne Boleyn liked such nightmares Lady Percy must not. Then she must get Mark to dance a *pavon* with her—called after a peacock—and as proud and stately. Mark hummed the music, and they turned and glided and passed under arches of their own arms, turning and swaying like grace incarnate. He could not see that she was teasing him, working upon his impatience, almost drawing blood from his heart with tiny feline scratches. A Percy, yes. But he must not be too sure of her. A cat can

be choked with cream, and she knew he must have sharp wine to prick his taste and temper to the point she needed.

She wreathed her lovely long throat with the hiding pearls about it and let her eyes dwell on Mark, but half closed—only an ambushed sparkle through darkest lashes.

“You dance better with me than with anybody,” says she, “our steps suit. Yours are more pat to mine than the echo. I *think* you to do what I need. Now—go!”

They swung round, slowly pivoting in opposing circles, and she looked at him again under their arched arms. The man’s eyes glowed on her.

“O, I forget!” she said. “You dance better with Madge Skelton! She says so. Go, Mark. I am not friends with you.”

She threw his hand aside and would have no protestations. She saw Percy had had enough, and it was the other man’s turn now. She dismissed him coldly, disregarding the angry look he lanced at Percy, and sank into her chair. They were alone, and the very thought of reproach melted in him at her careless cruelty to Smeaton. A girl’s fancy, and the man had genius for certain. Her true lover could not wish her insensible to that.

She called him to her caressingly.

“I am so tired, dear my lord. Mark is a hard master. I try to please him but it is music he loves, not me. He would stick a knife in my fingers as I play if I deserved it, and once he threatened it. George shall fetch him a clout on the ears if he is no milder.”

“Not George—me!” says Percy pulling a velvet stool and almost wrapping himself in the large folds of her green satin dress. It was cut square at the bosom and had a square border of goldsmith’s work set with emeralds, and the green fire gleaming from the gold responded to the lights and shadows of the rich satin billowing about her. What could he know of Simonette’s cousin the jeweller who worked in an obscure rat-hole in the street of the Little Waggon not far from the Parvis of Notre Dame and made glass jewels for lovely ladies who had pledged their own and who had not money to go fine? And if Percy had known would he have cared? She wore also, dropping from the pearls, a pendant curiously wrought of gold and the same emeralds, and was at her best and knew it.

He had meant to tell her the success of their plot first and so make interest with her, but her dear nearness prevailed, and the warm scent of orris-root that clung to all her garments. English women did not use it. It was an Italian trick picked up from some Italian women about the French

Court, one used to the luxuries of Venice—but she loved it and so also did her lovers. It made their hearts beat. His beat cruelly now. He caught her right hand as it lay slender-fingered on her satin knee. He spoke as simply as a boy at his prayers.

“Anne, I love you. I loved you at Hever. When you lifted your eyes as I followed your father they shone yellow as topaz and they cast a net of light about me and I could not sleep that night.”

She bent above him and whispered:

“I, too! I watched the moon. O, my heart! Is it true?”

“God’s truth. I, yours; you, mine. But, Anne,—you are a wonder-maid. How can you be for me?”

His gestures were awkward like a raw boy’s—he was so new at the game. His words tripped over one another. *She* played it as sweetly as her lute, with delicious hesitations and pauses and flute-like murmurs. A wiser man would have guessed her no novice;—her kiss was a mingling of many sentiments and each with its edge tried on some victim. But when he spoke of marriage her cheek brightened, and bowing over him until her hair mingled with his and her flesh was warm velvet against his flesh she pledged herself to an eternal troth and knew herself victress. Her father, the weeping Mary, George, all coursed through her brain. It would crush Mary, but some underling husband could be found for her. Her father would exult. George—George would miss her more than any human being. If they had been twins their brains—and what they called their hearts—could not work more accurately together. Hearts—yes. If she understood what people meant when they spoke of love she loved George and he her. Percy she did not love. He stirred no fire in her, as their cheeks lay together and his arms went about her, but the fire of possession and rapacious success, and in her that could be as strong as the flame of love in many another.

“Mine—mine!” she said as his arms went about her and hers drew his head to her bosom. But beyond that dark head she saw the towers of Alnwick and the vast Border heritage of the Percys, and a countess’s coronet (with no false emeralds) to bind her black-brown hair, and power and courts, and—“Mine—mine!” she murmured at his ear, and he glowed and thrilled to her touch, and she was wondering whether my Lord Cardinal would help or hinder. But Percy was better off of the two. He touched heaven. She plodded earth.

When she told George he mused a moment and said with irony:

“Good shooting! Your arrow was always true to the bull’s-eye.” Then, with a more human touch—“I shall miss you, Anne, but having climbed you will help me, and we shall sit together at the top of the ladder. I have no Jericho, but I have my pleasures and my debts. Certainly I shall marry, but even if you hate her, as you will,—for you never endured any woman but Simonette,—it will not sever you and me. We come from the one matrix.”

“Shall I have difficulty with his father?—and the Lord Cardinal?” she asked later.

George considered:

“No. Not if you win the Cardinal. He rules the Earl as he does most men. A Jew at a bargain, but our father will raise some sort of dowry for you on the home farms. Northumberland is servile as a pandar to the Cardinal, but we can get the Cardinal on our side.”

“And the King,” she said joyously, “if we manage our affairs right. Percy has the Queen’s consent and wagers on her good word for our marriage. At first I did think if I am to be Countess of Northumberland what matters pleasing at Court—and always there is Mary’s shadow hanging about us. But now I think better! Old Northumberland will never resist the King if I win him to me. Why not a dowry to the Court Jester? I shall shine and glitter and make a new court and Percy shall live in London and I will outshine Jericho and all its doings.”

“Yet do not win Wolsey too far,” George said with a jest. “I warn you, Madame the Jester, that the Lord Cardinal brooks no rivals in his way. It has been the Tower and the block for more than one who played that game, and he has subtler ways still. O, he is not of the new birth of splendour and art and pride of life in Italy—not he! An old stick-in-the-mud and hanger-on of the Pope. He will be Pope himself one day. But, none the less, no Pope—no Venetian—could teach him anything of the art of gently effacing an enemy. Win him, Anne,—he is open to sweet looks though he yields no policy to them. And win the Queen. In this Court she is the one stable thing—the one unfaltering influence, though you are too gay and proud to think it. Swim with the stream and win those two.”

“But there is no love lost between them,” said Anne wide-eyed. “She thinks him a lewd worldling, and he thinks her——”

“What matter what he thinks her?—An old frump, and so she is. But, none the less, the King’s anchor and the aunt of the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. That is why the Cardinal encourages Jericho. He will not have a gay young queen at the rudder, making new friends and policies. And now I am tired of policies. Give me wine—and sing—sing!”

They tuned their lutes and sang;—and a man passing with two priests behind him heard the ravishing harmony, and stopping said to the first:

“An angel’s voice, the woman’s, and no less the man’s. See who they be.”

The priest departed and returned, and the great Cardinal, stout and quick-eyed with prominent stomach jutting under his red robe and girdle and the red biretta surmounting his great pallid jowl, drew the curtain aside and looked in at the beautiful pair who did not hear him, their voices according in a long dying fall that dwindled and so ceased. Then they turned and saw him with his priests at his shoulder. George sprang to his feet and bowed as low as man could bow.

“Master George Boleyn?—Surely I have seen your face at Lambeth, and welcome, thrice welcome! Come often and lend a voice at our vespers. And this lovely lady with a voice of crystal—?”

Anne sank almost to the floor in a reverence. What woman in Europe would not have done the same?

Wolsey eyed her and imparted a gracious blessing. He was known for his kindness to young hopeful folk who might be turned to God knows what account later on. He made a pleasant remark or two—invited her to come eat the fruit in Hampton Court garden if the Court came that way, and passed on.

But to one of his priests,—a black-browed silent man, he said:

“A pretty bit of woman’s flesh and quick as a cat’s claw. Have her watched and tell me her lovers. The father is an old badger, but at my obedience.”

They went on with two new names on their list.

“I am no coward,” said George, “and all in all despise a shaveling, but I had sooner have that man with me than against me.”

Anne looked up in his eyes laughing, flushed with recent victory.

“A priest is a man first and a priest after, and therefore I would dare either priest or man. George, even now—even you—do not know how high I can spring!”

“To spring high may be to fall far. Well—I am off to see my bride-to-be. I think her insufferable, but that is neither here nor there.”

Chapter Six

THE QUEEN-DUCHESS had consented to be Ceres. Fingers were flying with needles. Tongues were chattering like starlings. The great, the unapproachable masquerade was drawing near, and the Queen answered for it that Henry had no suspicion that such a thing was in the wind. If Wolsey's spies—and they were everywhere—had smelt it out, it had not got past the Cardinal. Never a girl so happy as Anne! She had come to Court a slender silver slip of a crescent moon scarcely to be noticed among crowding stars, but now the crescent was rounding, the light was no longer tremulous, and literally every night it waxed in radiance. For every night her band of masquers assembled in a distant chamber set apart, and with Mark Smeaton for her right hand she taught and praised and reproved and showed the way as not another woman in England could have done. It was genius—no less! Her marvellous skill of gesture and movement;—the very wave of her hand or trip of her foot expressive of whatever she chose it to be was the envy and despair of all who saw. And she was a mistress of tact. She paired the men and women who loved to be together. She formed her sixteen in plastic groups lovely as a sculptor's,—she chose their colours as though she had been Holbein's self, and they knew, every woman of them and every man, that her care was to make them each beautiful that the whole might be beauty's triumph. In Anne it was art concealing art that apparently she herself was the last she thought of. She hung over the choice of a tint for gold-haired and brown-haired maids alike, and when touched by her solicitude they would say—"But you, Mistress Anne—what shall Colinette wear?" She would answer gaily:

"Colinette is a small affair. My Frenchwoman and I will toss together something when all my ladies are matched and contrasted. *N'importe!*"

And with a quick French wave of the hand she would be off with a swallow's dart to set the garlanded skirt of one of her great young ladies. Naturally the Queen-Duchess was not drilled. They had settled it that she had only to sit upon a rustic throne golden and scarlet with wheat and poppies and her golden hair flowing while the band skipped or knelt about her. But the good-humoured romp would gladly have done more had it been

possible and twice wandered in to see the pairs at work and vaguely gazed in Anne's direction and forgot her in chattering with Percy. Those Tudors—and who were they? thought Anne angrily. Why, the King's great-grandfather was only a simple poverty-stricken Welsh squire who had the luck to catch a royal widow's fancy! His very name was Tidder, transmuted to Tudor! And they showed it—these Tudors or Tidders! Compare Henry with his wife Queen Katharine or with Francis King of France, and to her mind the plebeian blood showed in every gesture.

Yes—Anne was fastidious, but not too fastidious when she had her own ends to serve. Mark Smeaton was her right hand in this business. George was a very spirit of suggestion but Mark was accomplishment. He was growing a beard—for no better reason than that the King was doing likewise—and it made him weirder and more goatish than ever, but what matter! Men do not value looks in another man, and women are wise enough to see through them to the inner heart, wit, sexual influence or what not. This certainly would be Anne's case though she tracked beauty down all her other hiding-places with a diligence worthy of piety. His face to her was excellent, a sheet of transparency through which she saw grace and music and wit and many more sprites intellectual and cunning weaving their spells. And what else mattered? He gave, and she took the stuff to make her success.

They were closeted together for hours, until even George observed with irony that nothing less than Mark's face would save her reputation. Percy writhed under it but was soothed with sweetest kisses and invited to be present at one of the conferences and observe how the time was spent. He came and after that opened the door and went and came as he would, entirely reassured to see their hard business and the management it took from both to wheedle silly men and women and jolt their duller brains into some dancing measure of beauty.

And now the betrothal was known,—vaguely as a morning mist. My Lord Percy was Mistress Anne's "servant,"—as they called an acknowledged lover. She, his "mistress." The Court buzzed; Queen Katharine smiled. The parents began to write very tentatively to each other of the money's worth of sons and daughters. The news reached the King and went in at one ear and out at the other, as the saying is. If he gave it a thought it was that my young Lady Percy could as well be at the trouble of helping her sister to a husband as he. Percy, swelling with pride, exulting in the noble prey he had brought down with Love's own bow and arrow, went off to the Cardinal, his master in statecraft, and opened a boy's heart to him, beseeching his good offices in these haggings for the rents of Hever farms against those of the Northumberland acres. The great priest clapped him on

the shoulder with the broad jests of the period considered suitable to marriage and all allied to it. Yes, he would have a word with my Lord of Northumberland when he came riding to London! But of what that word would be he said nothing, and though kindly was non-committal. Indeed he did not himself know what he would say. That must wait until he saw how the cat jumped. Northumberland was a big man, and his spies, sharp as razors, brought him word that this young beauty of twenty was other things besides beautiful, stirring, ambitious, dominant. He remembered that Jericho was beginning to pall, that Henry, though but thirty-five, was aging early after the manner of the Tudors. And that ulcerated leg—the seed of which he had brought with him from France and the Field of the Cloth of Gold—made horsemanship and hunting a less passionate pleasure than in the days of the old curvettings and prancings and Wild Huntsman raids through English woods. The deer and woodland creatures had now to be driven past Henry to ensure certain butcherings. He over-ate, over-drunk, was sedentary and heavy, and in short it was plain that domestic amusements would fill his leisure hours more and more.

But this girl with Irish fire in her eyes—falcon more than dove—was not the minister my Lord Cardinal would choose for them and in so far he approved Percy's choice. For the girl he himself wanted for the King he would survey the field leisurely and choose a flower, golden, serene, and amenable to guidance,—though with brains enough to amuse a man until he should be ready for the next.

Therefore he smiled on Percy, though as a man who keeps a thought or two up his sleeve, and when he was gone enjoined his spies to redouble their watch on the lady. And Percy, rushing to Anne, assured her of the great man's good will and made her eyes starry with joy. Her consequence expanded immensely. To be one of Anne Boleyn's "Revellers," for so they called them, was to strut in the fashion. She also expanded like an opening flower sure of summer breezes and rapturous to open and inhale them. Simonette's brother sent over a bundle of rich new stuffs from Genoa by way of Paris which would cause eyes to open presently.—Not yet.

But all this,—Mark Smeaton, Anne's growing audacity, her carelessness, George's carelessness over the jewel he should guard, and above all—Percy—Percy—drove Wyatt mad. He knew that words could only widen the breach. He knew, if any rag of hope was left to cover Love shuddering in a winter blast, patience, submission only could use it with a girl like Anne. But—madness of love!—he rushed on his fate. One day he met Smeaton coming from her sitting-room humming a tune, very jaunty and self-satisfied. And his soul loathed Smeaton, and not only Smeaton but the

cursed world that thwarts the deserving. He marched straight into Anne's room and found her with her own swiftness more sketching than embroidering poppies on a white linen for a guide to the embroiderers. She saw his face and instantly laid it down. He stood before her.

“What is it, True Thomas?”

“This, False Anne! Treachery. You never promised yourself to me but you were mine. Not by the last close bond but all else. What days have you sat with me in Blickling woods of heaven, lying in my arms, kissing me—speaking of a time to come—always to come but never there! O, you could slip away like a snake when a man claimed his right. Women may call that chastity but men know better. It is the thought and not the gesture. And now you are contracted to Percy and fooling Mark and others, and where am I? Where?”

His voice was hard as a north gale carrying sleet. His words struck her like pellets. Hurt her a little also! She liked Wyatt as much as it was in her nature to like any man. Not to marriage.— That was a commodity to be bought under conditions he could never fulfil. But—she liked him, and as she loved music in Smeaton she loved his gift of honey-sweet words and the bitterness of the poet who sees the world as it is and knows it as it should be. She stretched her hand up to him.

“True Thomas, do not be angry with your Anne——”

“My Anne!” he repeated, but unlike a lover.

“Because, dear my heart, you know well I must marry Percy. To you I will say—whisper!—that a curl of your hair is worth to me more than Alnwick and the man. But I have no choice. You do not lose me. We move in the same round and we shall meet,—yes, meet!”

The simple words convey nothing of the look in her eyes. Easy to write drafts on the future and disown them when payment falls due, and had there been cash to back the credit even then Wyatt was not to be tempted that way. He wanted his own like a man and not to filch from others. He was in no mood for heroics, and wild romantic outbursts were not in tune with the past and their playmate terms and the comradeship that had been. He therefore did a thing most unexpected to her who knew not what to expect. He drew up a chair and sat down within reasonable distance and drew a paper from his pouch.

“Why, Anne, if so it is to be, so be it! But I shall remember—even when another woman lies in my arms I shall remember my first love—and that

shall be my solace,—my true love! And two nights ago I wrote a pretty verse or two that will point the past for you as for me. Listen!”

He read in a low voice:

*“Thanks be to fortune it was otherwise,
Twenty times better!—but once especial—
In thin array, after a pleasant guise,
When her loose gown did from her shoulders fall
And me she caught in her long arms and small,
And, therewithal full sweetly did me kiss,
And softly said, ‘Dear heart, how like you this?’”*

Anne snatched furiously at the paper.

“How dare you? It is a lie—a lie!”

He stuffed it back into his pouch and went on from memory.

*“It was no dream, for I lay broad awaking.
But all is turned now, through my gentleness,
Into a bitter fashion of forsaking,
And I have leave to go of her goodness,
And she also to use new-fangleness.
Since that I so unkindly now am served—
‘How like you this?’—what has she now deserved?”*

“Yes—I shall remember that night of June when you came silent as a ghost to my chamber to torture me with barren kisses. Set it to music, Anne,—it would go sweetly to Smeaton’s lute and a French tune, and sing it to Percy and ask him—‘How like you this?’”

“Thomas, you would never tell it to Percy?” she gasped.

“Tell it to Percy—no. Men do not tell. And you left my chamber pure as you came. Yes—as you came. No more, no less. But we must understand one another. Be honest for five minutes. It is not a long while lost out of a lifetime. Will you swear truth for five minutes?”

She tried to put on an air of dignity:

“I am no liar, and——”

He passed her words over:

“Only five minutes,—truth for five minutes! Surely not too much to pay for peace?”

Bitterly angry but still more bewildered she agreed.

“I swear,—to a most ungracious man.”

That too he passed over.

“Then tell me, Anne. Is there in the long years any hope for me for anything better than sly kisses?”

She answered through almost shut lips:

“None.”

“And you will marry Percy?”

“Yes.”

“And do you hate me?”

Instantly like a sleuth-hound she scented a falter in his purpose. Love might be frozen in the cold—he was not dead. But she went warily—and with no mind to be held up to shame at Court with words however lovely,—so little she knew him! She answered with no passion, but a sad coldness composed and very believable.

“Thomas—I will answer as before our Creator. I could not marry you and Percy I must marry. Is my father likely to consult my heart—and especially after Mary’s mishap? But this I say—I am no temptress, but I cannot spare my best friend, the dearest and best of my friends. True Thomas, do not cast me off.—That night in June—O sweet!—Was *I* not tempted?—but I fled. Now, I say—You have known me from a child. Be good to me. Help me with your lovely words and true purpose. Marry some good woman that will bear you generous children. You love children. But remember your elf of the woods and still tune her soul to beauty. You began that work. Do not end it. My soul would starve. And I could not lose your sister Mary. I love her. Do not tell this of me!”

She had the wisdom to lay no hand on his, but sat and let her eyes speak for her with touching simplicity. The strings she played on were memory, childhood, and youth—and they made a music so sweet that for the moment it drowned love’s diapason.

“Marry?—Is not that a touch of the cruel?” he said.—“And yet—perhaps best! I can forget you in no other woman, but in a little dark-eyed Anne in leading-strings I might. Children at least are true—for a few brief years. And now, for the five minutes of truth are all but past,—you love me as a friend—you will trust me? You will tell me your secrets and ask my counsel as at Hever long—long ago? You will take it,—when I know best?”

The best of men—and poets—are fools! She clasped her hands earnestly and said:

“All this I promise.”

There was silence. He said at last:

“Then a word of warning. Beware of Smeaton. He is a talking man who magnifies his tales. He will boast to Madge Skelton and others of favours you have not given. In a word—he is no gentleman. Never be alone with him.”

“This masquerade is tomorrow. After that, never!”

“Again, George has your own recklessness and more. He should marry—for the women run after him as men pursue you, and their jealousies will most surely wreck him. I know you can ill spare his love, but—find him a wife!”

“That is good counsel. George will not be led, but what I can do I will.”

“A last word of warning. In this court the Cardinal is the pivot of power. For you, Percy and all depend upon him. He is having you watched. His priests are busy. Win him. Honourably. But win him. It may be done now but cannot later.”

Her face darkened.

“I hate a priest and this one worst. Simonette tells me——”

“Ah—Simonette! That is my last caution. Simonette is not the woman for you. She is low-minded, accessible to bribes—a haunter of secret corners and forbidden doings. Have no secrets with the wench. Pack her back to France. She is enough to ruin any girl’s reputation at Court, and I have seen her whispering with Mark Smeaton.”

So had Anne, and very well knew the reason, since it was on her own errand. But she replied meekly:

“You may be right, True Thomas. I will watch. If I thought the slut took bribes——”

Half satisfied, Wyatt rose. Had he forgotten that the five minutes’ worth of truth were spent and that if crucial questions are asked even five minutes is a too large allowance?

“And now I will go. And I will come as I did and be your counsellor if no better can be. At least to me it is the half loaf that keeps a man from starving.”

He looked at her with an expression she could not decipher, with all her quickness in reading men, and left her angry, oppressed with a sense of dangers more clouds than facts, yet painful as dreams that can never be worded on awaking but haunt the day.

She must dash them aside, for the time was packed with preparation and merriment, and in the evening Wyatt came with the rest and no more to

show for the morning's talk than if it had never been. And even her cares were stilled by the good understanding of her dancers, now in their shepherd-array and fine and delicate as young men and women of breeding must be when set off to the best advantage. The King was away to see Wolsey and would return next morning, and they used the Painted Hall as they would that evening, though chairs took the place of wheat-shocks. There was an army of serving-men and women, and a great chair was set for the Queen-Duchess to represent her rustic throne. In trooped the dancers, man and maid, in all their bravery, Mark Smeaton in red and green accentuating his goatish looks with well-contrived hoofs to cover his feet—a rustic English Pan known as “Robin Goodfellow” throughout the land. He carried a set of wooden pipes and played a wild thin music upon them like the wind in the trees at night. Even Queen Ceres, splendid in gold tissue and a crown of wheat-ears, sitting plumply upon her throne clapped her hands at the sight of his strange antics and prancings.

Anne alone was not dressed to her part. She made her excuses to the Queen-Duchess and to all. “Indeed her Frenchwoman and she had been so full of others’ dresses that her own was but now in the making.” It was felt she had been unselfishness itself, and pretty it was to see how in her simple white satin flowered with silver she directed all with a look, a gesture, or, at the outside, a whisper quick as a breath. All made their reverences when the little Princess Mary came forward, peering her way with honest short-sighted eyes, preceded by two small elves, to offer to her aunt her great gilded cornucopia wreathed with vine-leaves and to be brimmed with fruits and flowers. She knelt with grace and was raised and kissed on the brow and seated by the feet of the goddess.

“It went to a miracle!” said George when the greater folk were gone and the dancers crowded round to reassure one another. “Unless the King’s Highness has a pain in his temper that nothing can assuage he will laugh at Robin Goodfellow and Colinette and indeed at all of us. We are excellent good jackanapes—all said and done!”

But he knew and Anne and Smeaton knew that some of the best songs and dances—above all the “Harvest Courtship”—had been reserved for the great night. For all others this was a secret.

The King returned in a wearied temper. Wolsey had held his nose to the political grindstone and could not do otherwise, for Europe was simmering like a boiling pot, and he would be a wise man who could tell at what instant it would boil over and on what scalded nation. The King was sick of it, sullen and angry, and when Katharine bid him to the Painted Hall, telling

him after the hackneyed fashion that she believed some strange passing players had a show to entertain him if he would graciously consent, he held back like a sulky boy and swore he did not care a groat for the faded old fripperies of classical or Moorish dressing-up which he had seen to satiety.

But the Queen coaxed him with what skill she had, leading him on as a dog follows a plate of bones.

“And our daughter will shine—see if she does not!”

That tempted him, and he came to the hall leading Katharine himself, jewelled like a King of Diamonds, sewn with hanging pearls and rubies.

They were seated with an expectant crowd of nobles and their wives and parasites, male and female, in as starry attire as their purses could muster and more. Perfumes had been burnt in the hall, and the air was sweet and heavy. A great curtain of velvet cut off near half the space and that was a French novelty which Anne had contrived to heighten expectation. Indeed her aim was to come as near a stage-play as she dared, and she dared more than most.

It did heighten expectation. The King looked with some interest at two bright red and blue pages who stood ready to haul back the heavy folds. A thin heady music rose from behind them and thrilled along the finger-tips,—rustic music, and slowly the folds receded and the Court was gone and a Kentish cornfield stretched before them with yellow shocks of ripe wheat tossing like spray into the air:—a painted cloth with trees surrounded the field, and the murmur of running water was heard very sweetly.

A queer elfish figure pranced forward with bows and wavings and quick gesticulations. To the sovereigns of the land he announced that a troop of Kentish mummers would do their best to please a taste too high for human pleasurings—yet their best. The well-built figure and strange wild face of Robin Goodfellow pleased the King, and he nodded good-humouredly:

“Get on, God ’a’ mercy, good fellow!” and lolled back with a gold goblet of wine beside him in sensuous comfort.

And now the music was summoning.—No longer a breeze in the boughs it called—“Come—come dance! Come!”—the music tripped to a measure and when the pipes could no more he flung them away and snatched a fiddle from the corn, capering wildly as he played.

From a shock where he lay unseen rose a most beautiful and gallant young shepherd in gold and white, crook in hand, and before him intent on business he drove a few extremely white and curly sheep. Not long intent on business, however! The satyr’s maddening music caught him and he paused,

leaning on his crook while the sheep dispersed to nibble the wheat. But alone—an Eve-less Adam, as the King commented.

From another shock of wheat a golden girl sat up rubbing sleepy eyes. She sat looking about her and, amazed, beheld the capering satyr and the dancing man. Instantly the thing became a story. It turned on emotions, and before this all the masquerades had been pageants—no more. The King took another mouthful of wine and leaned forward to watch. He could not yet distinguish her features.

Frightened, she tried to burrow into the golden corn. Her dress was bright golden-yellow and green and white; jonquil colours. Dropping his fiddle the satyr sprang forward, caught the shrinking thing in his arms and tossed her upward in them—light as thistledown, then set her on the ground holding her by the hand. He beckoned to the beautiful young shepherd, all in gold and white to match her, and forcing their hands together snatched up his fiddle and began his mad music and capering. The pair stood amazed—holding hands, at first reluctantly, afterwards with awakening glances. The King leaned further forward. Eden again—but the snake was a riotous satyr.

The young man glowed on the girl,—he pressed her hand to his lips. She retreated. He advanced. She fled circling through the wheat-shocks. He pursued. From a jest,—a harmless flurry, it became amorous and all the Court conjectured. She flung him off and danced deliciously—that must satisfy him. He stood to watch, and she came swaying up to the curtain, holding flexible hands out, wreathing them sinuously about her until they became instinct with life and were a lure. George the shepherd watched Anne the shepherdess critically but confidently. She could do it. She would. O, exquisite! Slender as a gold and white jonquil dancing in the wind on its slim green stalk she captured every eye that saw her. A jonquil tended by French gardeners. She blew on a breeze rather than touched earth—a fairy thing.

That there was poetry in this king cannot be doubted, for he loved it, he wrote it, and not ill. And that slim blowing thing touched its string—he hoped yet feared she would escape. The satyr incited the shepherd, the music quickened. He caught her dancing and flung his arms about her, and they danced together—she won to utter consent. He pressed and kissed her—Anne herself had allowed the dance was amorous!—and—in a word, the old story. But, as they swung towards the ripe wheat, the two golden figures

*“Where Goldilocks and Goldilocks
Shall wed in the land of the wheaten shocks,”—*

behold! a troop of rainbow dancers, man and maid, sprang from every one, and they were the butt of laughing witnesses. Colinette hid her face in her hands, you might almost see the rosy fingers blushing! and then burst into silver excuses in song to the tune of the hidden harpsichord—

“What is this love that moves the sun?”—

while all stood intent to hear. It is true that even the Duchess had not known what she would sing, and in this she excelled herself and made surprise the servant of delight even for them. She moved among the charming groups, singing—singing, to ask their mercy and paused, her head drooping on its slender stem—awaiting judgment.

Then George, who had not for nothing trained his voice in Italy, the nest of song. He caught and held even the King’s eye a moment from the Lady Jonquil, with notes mellow as summer fruit and Wyatt’s pleading words:

*“And wilt thou leave me thus?
Say nay, for shame!
To save me from the blame
Of all my grief and grame— [woe]
And wilt thou leave me thus?
Say nay!
Say nay!
And wilt thou leave me thus?
That have given thee my heart
Never for to depart—
Neither for pain or smart.
And wilt thou leave me thus?
Say nay!
Say nay!”*

He stretched open arms to the truant, and she came to them with reluctant sweet delay, and again they danced, leaping and springing for the joy of life, and about them the merry morris tossed and sang. They all broke into the old English dance called the Hey, cracking their fingers and thumbs in air, the men whooping to the crack,—the maddest revel! and for a groat the flush-faced King would have joined them!

“But who are the two?” he whispered to the placid Queen. “Sure, by God’s Body, they are lovers in earnest or they could not so play the game. But the girl is meat for his masters, handsome lad though he be!”

“Why, no!” she answered. “Sure you know them, sire. It is George Boleyn, son of your one-time Ambassador to Paris, and his sister Anne, my maid! She could not make so free with any but her brother. But meat for his master she is, for she is contracted to young Percy,—see, that is he in her

colours, green and yellow, among the dancers. A pretty play, though not sober enough for English taste of yours or Spanish of mine. The capering man has a touch of the devil.”

He had. The King agreed to it, but eagerly, for his fancy was riveted. He would have had it continue for ever. He detached a silk purse that hung to the jewelled girdle about his portly middle and flung it ringing with coins to Mark’s feet, who picked it up, saluting low. A King’s bounty can never come amiss, and he stood in need of it and more, for his life was luscious.

What need to tell the rest of the masquerade? Let us take it through the King’s eyes—who cared nothing for Queen Ceres nor even for the Princess Mary pacing and peering and spilling the apples from her heavily laden cornucopia till they ran about the ground and the ready Anne and Mark made it a part of the play and all the dancers scrambled after them and laid them rosy-cheeked at the feet of the Queen-Duchess, while the poor princess blushed as red for her fault.

And when the grape-harvest followed, and Anne, wreathed with purple grapes about her black-brown hair—agate-eyed and a most enchanting nymph—sang the Grape-song of Bordeaux to Mark’s hidden accompaniment, he rose to his feet and clapped his great hands and crushed down between the ranks of lords and ladies to what may be called the stage, and shouted for a general revel, with Anne’s hand firm clasped in his own to lead them. A general revel it was, for all joined it, and every man seized a woman like a second Rape of the Sabines, and because Mark’s music was lost among so many, the King’s musicianers were sent for, and right merry and lusty music they made to the dancing feet and dancing eyes.

“Mistress, you are the world’s jewel!” the King whispered under the vine-leaf that veiled Anne’s little ear. “And you have sat as mum and sly as a soft little cat that only hunts mice at midnight. Such singing—such dancing! But you shall not kiss even your brother so without my rebuke. These kisses are for lovers—lovers only. And you shall tell who taught you or I will kiss you twenty times before the whole Court.—See—the Queen leads the way to the banqueting room. Sweet, I were unmannerly to take you out and not to kiss you! My pretty sweeting!”

A novice would have been certainly abashed at this amorous tumult, but Anne knew every move in the game of attack and evasion. She caught Madge Skelton in the one hand and with the other beckoned the other girls to approach, and the King kissed them in a curtseying line and thanked all with boisterous jests and laughter for the good pastime they had given him. The men also,—George and Mark had their special meed of praise and not

one was forgotten. But it was with Anne he led the way into the banqueting room where the long tables were laid and wines and cakes and comfits served in great splendour of wax lights. It was by Anne he stood even when he told the Queen-Duchess how her gold locks had graced Queen Ceres, and rallied his young daughter on spilt apples while Anne bowed to her knees. He called her “my Lady Jonquil” so openly that even the Queen could not take a fear, comforting her heart with the thought of Percy—who indeed stood by his love with that air of the showman which marks ownership. But of that air Henry took no notice.

And so the evening went by to merriment and the tune of a roistering success, and when the Queen rose and all made to disperse the King commanded another masquerade as soon as it could be prepared and so gave his hand to the Queen and went off with a backward glance to my Lady Jonquil. Some of the men made a band to escort her to her own rooms as Queens are led to their chambers.

“The King has joined the Band of Youth!” said Smeaton with his smile. “And you may ask and have, Anne, like the Lady Salome. Whose head will you demand on a silver dish? It should be mine, for I had such a fright when the Lady Mary’s grace let the apples fall that I nearly missed the beckon you gave me. Poor little lady—she blushed crimson! Well, a good night to you all, revellers, and may our next venture top this!”

“It must and shall!” George Boleyn said gaily, “and then we may all choose our places and peerages! You shall be Laureate when Skelton dies, Tom Wyatt, with the title of Thomas the Rhymer—a good old Scots tag.

*“He would sing the fish from out the water,
And blood from out the stane,
And milk out of a maiden’s breast
That bairn had never nane.—*

Indeed your words are sweet. ‘Say nay! Say nay!’ ” he sang under his voice. “But what for Mark and what for Anne? Something Satanic for Mark. He looked like the Prince of Darkness catching souls into his goldenest net.”

“Sir Urian!” suggested Wyatt with a loathing eye on Mark. He was using a common English appellation for the cloven-footed Black One who goes by in the night mocking the very gods. And indeed Mark, who was made paler and more burning-eyed by the rich wines he carried, looked the part not a little.

“And for Anne,” continued Wyatt, “I have found a title also—‘The Forsaking Lady.’ ”

He laughed but with an acidity that George, for one, noticed.

“And what shall we understand by this?” he demanded.

“Why, a child can tell that! Success sets woman or man aloft on a pinnacle, and pinnacles are solitary because there is only room for one to balance on them. But we shall all look up and worship and envy. And now a drink—a last drink to the Revellers with the King’s Highness as our leader.”

They drank and went to their beds, and success, dazzling in Anne’s eyes like sparks of fire, kept her awake half the night. She was plotting how she must use it to open the way for Percy and bring his father to reason at least cost to hers. She had much to consider.

Part Two

Chapter Seven

A FEW days later Harry the King sent to the Mistress of the Revellers a golden flower enamelled like a jonquil with the motto about it, "*J'y pense*." He sent to George Boleyn a set of aglets in gold, the elaborate little hooks or pendants to be sewn on fashionable garments, and to Mark Smeaton a set of aglets in silver with tiny sparks of some inferior jewels. To all he sent royal commendations and thanks for the good pastime he had had of them, and it was conveyed that he hoped for more. Though there was nothing to rouse scandal in Anne's gift she sprang at once to the pinnacle of Wyatt's illustration and stood there alone;—not a saint—in fact a good way from saintship, but looking down upon all about her while they with envy and much conjecture looked up.

Judge if it stimulated her! She, George, and Mark Smeaton sat with their heads together plotting and planning new triumphs for the Christmas feasts, and Percy was drawn in with the much more intellectual Earl of Surrey her first cousin, to search the papers of those two lordly families for some historic episode connected or unconnected with them which would be episodic enough to be interesting and flatter the King's pride. They had their instructions and searched with assiduity, Percy thus giving her a respite from his company, posting here and there and even inviting the great Cardinal's advice (who strongly recommended that some compliment to the Queen should also be implied in the choice), and finally beseeching aid from the learned and humorous Sir Thomas More, dear to fame and Henry's close friend known for his historic learning. That gentleman, with a twinkle, suggested Fair Rosamond, observing that as "the young Lady Jonquil's reputation was stainless and the Queen incapable of the poison bowl it would be a pretty piece of fable which could reflect discredit or allusion on none and interest in all."

On Percy remonstrating that he did but mock him since kings even in play must not be shown to have the weaknesses of private men, More replied gravely that this was very true, and as Orientals were scarcely to be counted either kings or men, being infidels, why not choose an episode from the East rather than the more spiritual West? Percy ran to Anne with this

idea and was not scouted. She and Surrey, Wyatt and George, backed by Norris and Smeaton, all sat in council over it, and beat their brains to recall or invent some romance from further East than Turkey. Finally, in a burst of inspiration George bethought him of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba,—the famous visit to be given as inspired by motives entirely impersonal. King Solomon had many advantages;—being an Israelite (though not without guile) his race was sufficiently despised to allow of setting him on the stage to amuse Christians, and yet being a Biblical character his little sins of commission would be covered with the ermine of sanctity and could not be construed into allusions.

“No better person could be imagined!” said George. “It is a marvel of juggling as great as balancing a feather on your nose—yours, Norris, which is a mere button!—to see how Christendom has always preserved the mask of respect for these patriarchs of the Church while flaring forth in preachments against the vices they practised which indeed should be disgusting to any Christian soul! Christendom would alike burn a man alive for whispering scandal against King Solomon and for ordering his own life on that sovereign’s pattern.”

He sat on a table swinging his legs and looking as pale and handsome as a young soldier-saint of a girl’s dream, but his smile betrayed the scoffer. Anne clapped her hands and laughed like crystal bells.

“Who votes? I am for Solomon the chaste and wise!”

“I also!” said Surrey, “but on one condition. King Solomon must have his lawful Queen—some one of you must search out who she was—to sit in state beside him. Otherwise the Revellers may revel in the Tower.”

Percy jumped up—alert and eager.

“Queen Bathsheba, I think. Yes—that will fulfil my Lord Cardinal’s desire to please the Queen. She must sit in state by his Solomonic Majesty and receive the Queen of Sheba as a sister. I do not very well remember the story, though I have heard my Lord Cardinal preach more than once on its edifying nature, but——”

“Bathsheba!” interrupted Wyatt. “You are wrong, man, wrong. She was Uriah’s wife and King David’s—ahem!—and Solomon’s mother, and it is a most scandalous story that would drive the King and Queen mad and all of you to the Tower. No, King Solomon’s lawful wife was—God knows I forget which! But she must be beautiful and a great princess, and she and the Sheba Queen like doves in one nest, and so all will go well.”

“Beautiful!” said Anne, “if any of you can trace her out. The part would suit Madge Skelton to a nicety, and I will be the Queen of Sheba and sing to her and she answer back and with me. We had no *duo* for women in the Harvest masque. And you, Surrey, shall write the masque and True Thomas the songs, and we will stuff it like plum porridge with praises of King and Queen. And it may be that Holbein can give us some pictures of what dresses they wore or whether they went dressed in leaves and jewels—which indeed I cannot tell.”

Contending voices and opinions arose. These Parliaments, as she called them, were the delight of Anne’s soul. The free-and-easy comradeship, the play of laughter and quick poetic talk from three at least of the men, the oddities of Mark Smeaton’s sudden incursions into the talk were all to her taste and recalled France so nearly and dearly that once she told them she could cease to weep for the Tuileries while they were about her. She liked it none the less also because women seldom intruded. Madge Skelton and one or two others were the only ones, and they seldom, and thus she ruled unquestioned Queen of Quips—for so they called her. Business done, they united in glees and madrigals, and if they had but known it King Harry himself was more than once a secret listener to the delightful harmony, though, for reasons, that fact was not yet to be known. Delightful it was, and the talk also. It may very well be that he would have liked to take a hand there. Kings however can seldom enjoy good talk—their presence quells lesser tongues as the eagle silences singing-birds, and trouble comes of it if they sing. He could little guess—seeing Anne occasionally dark, demure, and sumptuous like a folded rose in the Queen’s chamber—in what reckless jest and repartee she took her part when thrusts and mockery were tossed from George to Wyatt and buffeted from Mark to Surrey and back again through Anne. They spared nothing in heaven or earth. That fashion George and Wyatt had learnt in Rome where, it being “the kitchen of the good God,” according to the Frenchman, everyone knew exactly how the food of the soul was made and dished up to the faithful, who received it as manna from heaven.

But this wildness in Anne frightened Percy, and though he was collared and chained more heavily daily as her slave, he half feared as well as adored. Could anything so uncaptured and wilful be really his? Could she serve even one day’s use as a faithful obedient wife after the good old pattern? And would he himself wish her docile, timid, and obedient as wives run? He understood her no more than he understood himself or what he felt for her. Only he knew she was a bitter-sweet wine more heady than any juice of grape, and his mind clouded like a drunken man’s with the potion.

Sometimes Surrey called her the Sorceress and declared he saw a light in her room late o' nights and little black bats crowding like moths to it—black bats with eyes of flame who had promised her a ruby ring to make every man her lover on condition she would promise her soul in return.—“Your sweet, sweet soul, Anne!” he said. “Did you promise? Tell me. I saw them thick as gnats in July, but a moonless night.”

And Mark answered for her:

“She promised. Look at the drop of blood on her right hand”—where indeed glowed a fine table-ruby of her mother's. Then Percy would kindle and declare she needed no devil's help.

“You are Anne and none like you,” and Smeaton would break in with wild galloping witches' music with the horses of Fear driving through the clouds and swarms of bats and imps at their heels, and Anne, hair flying, naked as sin, leading the rabble rout with her clear cry.

It amused and pleased her, but Percy hated it and would have hated it more had he known how spies lurked and peeped and whispered it all in the Lord Cardinal's ear.

But Wolsey himself could not have swept back the rising tide of joy and freedom—which he would have called libertinism, as indeed it was,—with any Episcopal broom. The moment had come—the inevitable spring which releases the icy founts to flow free, and had it not been Anne it must have been another. In Italy had begun the revolt against the fetters of a religion much more political than spiritual, and as the freshet burst it carried much public opinion with it, especially among the Latin races. Men condoned, openly condoned and took for granted, sins that would have been buried in darkest secrecy a few years before. After all, human nature must play! The torrent swept France. It invaded England, but there it met the Teutonic stiffness reinforced in the English by Scandinavian blood, dominating, honest, and obstinate. Would these men, who whatever they might do or say themselves wanted their women chaste and clean-lipped, accept this new Evangel? Luther's Reformation also aided the opinion in ways his dour nature would very little have approved.

Often Wolsey the Cardinal wondered to himself as the reports reached him—how it would be and whether Anne and her Revellers would break like a wave against cliffs of English granite or storm them and flood the land. As a moral question it really did not interest him one way or another. As a political one it might mean a little for it might overcome the traditional English hatred of France and French levity. And if that or anything else helped him to the Popedom and Henry to the headship of the Holy Roman

Empire he would take it for what it was worth. At that moment he thought he could have set his heel on Anne and her Revellers and stamped them into the mire. But it was not worth while.

They even amused him sometimes. Percy was always at his beck and he made him bring George Boleyn to York House and heard him sing and praised him and encouraged him to tell merry tales of Rome, Boccaccio-like, and sometimes even tangling monk and nun in their merriment, and smiled all over his broad pale face with a smile which never reached his eyes. But though George might lance a jest at the Church Visible in her lesser servants,—not a word—not a word to implicate the Church Invisible! Once he glanced near it and looked up to meet an eye that stabbed to the very marrow. Wolsey merely waved a hand and changed the subject, but Percy quailed, and George, though he still went to York House, had learnt his lesson and changed the key of his tune.

The new masque exceeded the first alike in splendour and success. Anne in black and gold, her dark hair flowing to her knees, plaited with jewels, timid and trembling, her spirit failing within her as she sank at Sir Francis Weston's knees and he extended a glittering sceptre which she touched almost fainting, might suggest the thought of a sweeter though equally humble submission to a real monarch who sat enraptured to see. Francis Weston's looks indeed were more in Adonis's way than in a Jewish and bearded Solomon's, but the picture was entrancing, as was also his deference to his lawful spouse who sat enthroned beside him and descended so lovingly to embrace the trembling visitant and restore her spirits. Scandal in Jerusalem would have been impossible! They united dulcet voices, soprano and contralto, in a joint tribute to the celestial wisdom of the King.

Wolsey also sat to see the sight and owned that these sanctified characters had been treated with due respect while at the same time human interest had been imparted to their virtues. Indeed, Solomon glittered in some of his own splendours, for Percy had begged the loan of a cope of stiff gold miraculously emblazoned with fiery jewels which outshone the false jewels in Weston's high pointed and gilded crown.

Naturally the exalted Christian characters could not dance, but they sang extremely well, and a dance was given for their pleasure in which the Queen of Sheba (as a still unconverted pagan) was the goddess of some Abyssinian aboriginal dancing as conceived through Latin eyes, slow and languorous with waving hands and trailing sumptuous robes for the Queen and her travelling escort of ladies. At first sight the dance might be pronounced more dignified and decorous than the leaps and springs of the old English

merry morrises, but it was not only Henry who found that it stirred dormant pulses in the blood through causes uneluctable and lying deep down in the primitive soil of man's nature where Christendom had planted seeds of grace and perhaps a few unconsidered weeds with them. Weeds also fructify, though their fruit is more bitter than the cultivated variety, and it is notorious that they ask no help in their multiplication.

At all events, Henry bid the Queen of Quips next day to a room where only choicest guests entered, that she might receive his kingly thanks. It caused her no surprise. No woman alive could more quickly gauge the weight of opinion and its own influence for or against her than this girl, and she went her way to the audience only considering what immediate use, if any, she could make of it.

Her father, pale with fury, had seen her that morning and in a thunderous mood which almost included her in the crime had told her that Mary the incorrigible had betrothed herself to young George Carey. George Carey! Penniless! A mere hanger-on at the Court, and only that because he had some colouring of Henry's own blood in his veins through the great House of the Beauforts.

"And God knows," said Sir Thomas, all but foaming, "that if the King were to provide for all the beggarly regiment of his cousins he would have work that would hinder him in his royalty. Carey! He will never give him so much as a kick, much less a groat! The slut—the drab!"

But indeed his names for Mary elude all modern repetition—which toils panting and dumb behind.

Anne was silent for a moment and then suggested that perhaps Mary was fortunate to find anyone who wanted a fool for a wife. This did not appeal to Sir Thomas.

"If men took only wise women to wife posterity would fail for lack of kissing. If he wanted a fool he had but to lift his eyes and look about him. But it is not he I blame but that——" And again modern taste gulps and declines the draught.

"But I renounce her from this day for evermore as daughter of mine, and if I catch you or George speaking or writing to her I will break your bones before I leave flogging you into obedience."

It was impossible for Anne to speak, and in any case she had no desire to plead for Mary. In this world people made their beds—chiefly of nettles, apparently—and must lie on them. She had no wish that sentimental Mary's nettles should sting her own fair back. Thankful to have escaped a stinging

box on the ear she went slowly on her way to the King with the thought flitting through her mind that though all the world ridiculed Mary, a sister living disowned and in poverty was no very desirable appanage for a lady who stood on the pinnacle of quite another sort of publicity. After all—if (without difficulty or any sort of compromising himself) Percy could say a word to the Lord Cardinal for some sort of a post for Carey it might be better for herself and soften matters into peace at home. At all events they would be rid of Mary and her follies.

Next minute she had forgotten her and was on her knees to the King, who sat in what may be called unbuttoned comfort—so free was it from formality,—with only one gentleman behind his chair—Sir Edward Howard. He looked at her keenly as she bowed to kiss his hand, and said at once but graciously:

“You come alone, Mistress Anne the Reveller. Was it not told you that I would see George Boleyn also?”

Still on her knees she apologized. They had not known and, by misfortune, George Boleyn had gone into London. He would die of mortification on hearing of the favour missed. But the King’s words relieved her. She knew his reputation so perfectly that it would scarcely have surprised her if some haphazard advance difficult to repel with grace had been made, and no Boleyn could wish a repetition of royal favour on such lines. But no. He kept her on her knees while Sir Edward Howard looked on curiously from behind the chair, as Henry said with a little mischief:

“And now, Queen of Whims [Blessed Saints, how had he caught the name?], I beseech your Grace, though I am no Herod nor you, the wicked witch Salome who demanded John Baptist’s head on a charger, that I may reward you for the excellent pleasure I have had of you and your merry companions—especially in dancing and most harmonious music. Therefore, kneeling, ask and have. I have not the sceptre here to extend to you as King Ahasuerus stretched his forth to his Queen Esther but—ask and have!”

His eyes twinkled kindness but no ulterior meanings, and Anne was completely reassured. She had caught him on exactly the side she wanted—sheer merriment and gaiety, and he asked that of her and no more. There she was ready to give with both hands and find her account in it. The Court itself was becoming more tolerable now that the spirit of pleasure was abroad. Even the Queen had been seen to smile, and for the last two months Jericho had languished in solitude so far as the Master’s presence was concerned. She glowed with inward satisfaction.

But the reward? Thoughts raced in her brain. A cautious beginning promises successful endings. Moreover it included her companions as well as herself. What? How? But with Anne thought was lightning and decision the thunder on its heels—the worse for her sometimes! She raised her face to him as it were half dazzled, like a flower in heavy sunshine, and said sweetly:

“Sire, we deserve no reward. What service to your Grace but is the breath of life to any English heart? Still, if your Grace so desires, I am ready to ask and have.”

She was all charms at the moment, but Henry’s open joviality never slid into anything personal.

“Speak, Queen of Caprices, and choose what you will for the Duke of Dreams and the Marquis of Merriment and all under your butterfly sceptre!”

She joined her hands with the pink fingers like pale coral to plead her cause for her. The hanging sleeve, still cunningly secured, veiled the unhappy little left hand from sight.

“Then I ask boldly! Sire, may we, your minions, have the happiness to continue as Court Jesters to the most merciful and gracious of Kings? We may be dull sometimes. Sometimes we may offend, but not wilfully. I ask beforehand your gracious pardon and your protection from the over-godly who censure us as light. Light we may be, but we intend no ill!”

“Nor do it, by the Body of God!” cried Henry, charmed alike by the reward asked and the speaker’s grace. “Your boon is granted, and I give you herewith an order on the Privy Purse for expenses on stuffs and garments and setting forth of the masques and borrowing of what robes you need. Tell this to your subjects and tell them also that if the over-good censure the over-good shall have *my* censure for their pains! Farewell, fair lady, and desire your companions to continue in their good work. But first this!”

He took from a chair where it lay a lute of the finest Italian work magnificently inlaid with gold and silver and mother-of-pearl in beautiful branching and floriated patterns. He added a gracious word as to hoping to hear her voice to its music. She thanked him, almost touching her forehead to the ground as she knelt, as a Tudor sultan expected, and then rose and backed to the door escorted by Sir Edward Howard with the deference suited to established Court favour. Released, she flew to find George. He had not returned, but Surrey was in her room with Wyatt and Smeaton, and in triumph they joined hands and danced a Ring o’ Roses, hand holding hand and swinging like gay children. George came later, and she got him alone and poured it all into his itching ears.

“Magnificent. And you were wisdom’s self,” he said. “Later we will ask and have with a vengeance!”

“It is certain the first thing I ask for myself will be his commands with Percy’s father, the crabbed old Northumberland. Our father told me cautious letters are coming from him as though we were a set of thieves who would steal his son and give no value for him. But if I have the King’s ear!”

“And how will the King bear to see the Queen of Whims disappear to Alnwick in the North?” demanded George, swinging his legs from the table in his favourite attitude.

“She shall not disappear!” cried Anne grimacing. “If Percy thinks I am one to be made an exile in a dungeon!— No, when the Court goes on its progresses I go to Alnwick. At other times I will be right-hand woman to the King and the Queen. O, the Lord Cardinal is right! She is too great to be shaken, son or no son, and while she stands I cling. The place suits me well till I get a better.”

“But if the King were a little less King and more than kind? Remember Mary, used and thrown off!”

She flamed. Could she not read a man’s eyes to the back of his brain? No—no Jericho for her! He wanted amusement there and to pick and choose as men do, but not her. She flew higher and caught his brain!

“I am stronger than he,” she boasted. “Any woman will serve a man and a king for his pleasure, but for to keep men gay and pass their time there may be but one woman and she to fix her price! My price is Percy and royal favour to make my market of.”

George the ironic was inclined to think that in this case Anne knew best. Mary might be regarded as a protection. Even kings do not play the game twice with the daughters of a trusted old servant. There is a decency that crowned mortals also must observe. She passed on from that eagerly to tell him of her father’s visit and the Carey folly, and there George’s cynicism, fed on Italian orgies, could give itself a loose. Better far that the family fool had taken him *par amours* and so forth.

“The one does not prevent the other!” said Anne.

Now there is such a thing as reckoning without one’s host—a fear which could never occur to the quick Boleyn brains of the pair. A danger to recur was that of over-rating their own cleverness and under-rating that of others. Wyatt had warned them of it often in Blickling woods, but what did they believe him!

For two weeks the mice scampered in glee and the cat reflected, then crouched. In other words, the King summoned the Lord Cardinal to Westminster.

Calm and cheerful in his scarlet the unwieldy pale man entered to make his obeisance to the burly florid one. Some new flurry from France or Spain, doubtless! Well, it could be met! England was looking up in Europe.

On invitation he sat and looked with sharpness under obsequiousness at the King. There was a smile about the heaviness of the King's face—the loose smile that speaks of pleasure not business. Wolsey had seen it often enough before to prepare the smile responsive, and it came to order.

“My friend” (the beginning was gracious), “I have been talking of late with a young lady who has the wit of an angel and is worthy of a crown! Beauty is the least part of her charms, though it overflows in her!”

Their tastes in women were not always coincident, but Wolsey smiled expectant.

“Of few women can that be said, your Highness,” he answered, hoping to provoke pleasant reminiscence.

“I mean it in all seriousness. Other women may boast, but this is the pearl of great price.”

The Prince of the Church passed over this somewhat profane tribute from the Prince of the Land.

“It is sufficient if your Majesty finds her worthy of your love. That love establishes a woman the world's beauty.”

But Henry's face began to gloom. He had remembered Mary—other things also now to be opened. He said, staring at his velvet shoe which eased the swollen leg:

“Fine enough! But I fear she would never condescend in that way. She is a falcon untamed and as bright of eye and proud of wing.”

Wolsey checked a smile, remembering on his part his knowledge of Court women. God, what women! Not one let her lover in at her casement but he knew it if he had a mind. But what is a woman's virtue one way or another in the great game of kings and kingdoms? He spoke seriously.

“Great princes have that in their power if they choose to play the lover which would soften a heart of steel.”

His response was pleasurable to himself. The King, intent on the love-game, would leave the European game in the hands of the English Cardinal who would be Pope.

“Is the name of the lady to be known or inferred?” he asked suavely.

“To be known, and the rather because there is much to be done and you must play your part in it. It is Mistress Anne Boleyn, maid to the Queen.”

If Wolsey’s mind did not work swiftly it was not for want of practice. It shot to its conclusion now. Well and good! The girl could amuse the King as well as intoxicate him—so much the more valuable. And as light as thistledown; no trouble of resistance there! All that his spies had told him warranted her for the position. Ambitious? Yes—but married to Percy and with her hands in the King’s purse the world would have little left to offer her. She could be satisfied indeed. He broke out in praises every one of which was a tribute to the King’s taste.

“I am a dullard not to have guessed. Who else should draw your Majesty’s eye? Fresh and young and a most rare and admirable beauty. In her all the graces of nature adorned by an education, as if her father could have foreseen her promise of greatness! Her favour passing sweet and cheerful. Her noble presence of shape and fashion representing more than can be expressed. I am told that in France it was she, not the Queen, who set all the tricks of dress, the highest ladies following to imitate what she made graceful and lovely.”

The King stemmed the raptures a little sullenly.

“True—all true and more. But there are obstacles hard to overcome and more impossible for me than another.”

“How—how?” The Cardinal was all eagerness.

“Sure it is said of the young lady that beauty and sprightliness sit on her lips. How could so bright a wit hesitate?”

“There are two obstacles—and I know not which is the worse. There is her sister Mary Boleyn.—The Boleyns say little, but it is a bar to their liking for the King, and the sweating rabble world quack and gabble and the more because the ignorant have made a scandal of me with her mother—a quick brown fool—as if I could ever have thrown more than a look or a kiss in her direction!”

On that point Wolsey could not be explicit. There was certainly a scandal. It was revived when Mary Boleyn went the way of all flesh, but since whatever it might be had happened in the days before he had taken charge of the King’s conscience he must take his word for it, as he would have done anyhow. He said with large tolerance:

“All that coil is nothing, your Grace. We can send our men about to teach the people better without knowing they learn. If that be all it is done.

Thomas Boleyn was never one to look a gift-horse in the mouth. Trust me for that!"

"But what of Percy?" the gloomy lover enquired. "I had sooner eschew a quarrel with the Northumberland faction at a time when we may want men and munitions any day. What of that, Master Cardinal?"

"A nothing—a nothing!" Wolsey said flicking a fly off his ample sleeve as though it were the notion of difficulty. "Percy is a sheep's head, and Northumberland and Boleyn are already haggling sharply over the terms. Moreover he is my man and therefore your Grace's. The thing is done, and you shall have the young lady in your arms in a month or less if it lies in my power."

But the King raged and fumed at this contract. He was jealous even of the past. To think that fool Percy should have had the freedom of her lips—to sit with hands clasped plotting their future joys! Who knew they had not foretasted them! He loathed it. He broke into one of the sudden tropic storms that alarmed even Wolsey.—How had they dared without asking the royal permission? It should be the law that no heir of a mighty family should contract himself without his father's consultation with the King. The Crown had its rights in all the great peerages, and so on—and so on. A storm with blind passion behind it; not to be thwarted but cooling as soon as satisfied. Wolsey knew that state of mind and that it must be humoured as must a lion when he roars for blood. Eating will ease his hunger. Love cures its own passion even to satiety.

"The remedy must be found and immediately. And shall!" he said manfully, and spent a further hour in listening to the roar of delayed and angry desire. He soothed and parried and promised and finally rode off, half exhausted, on his splendidly bedecked mule with his attendants before and after him, while the inevitable crowd drawn to colour and power watched and ducked but did not smile. Wolsey was not a popular hero—for reasons many and good.

Nor did he smile. He was wearied and on the whole would sooner not have outraged Percy, who had been a harmless and obedient follower of his power. But it must be done and opposition extirpated. He sent for him next day.

After the coarse fashion of the times a dozen of his hangers-on were permitted to be present. They would rub the vitriol into the wound to keep it raw and bleeding. Percy, entering with springing step in gay attire, halted suddenly when he saw the black look turned upon him, the jaw firm set even under its bags of flesh, the clenched teeth. A storm was upon him from blue

air, but why—whence? Without preface, the young man standing before him like a schoolboy before his recognized tyrant, it burst.

“I marvel not a little at your folly that you would thus attempt to contract yourself with a foolish girl yonder in the Court. Have you no respect for the high estate in the world given you by God? For, after your father’s death, you are likely to enjoy one of the noblest earldoms in the Kingdom, and therefore you should have first asked your father’s consent and consulted with the King’s Majesty, begging his princely favour and submitting all the matter to his Highness!”

Percy stood confounded. Such a notion had never entered his head. He had certainly asked Anne’s favour before his father’s, and that might be against the manner of the times but was pardonable in a lover, and his father, though grumbling a little, had taken it not wholly amiss. Never too strong-minded in a storm—perhaps he had weathered too many of them in childhood, and a man may break a little with usage—he turned ash-pale and clasped his hands nervously in one another, a pitiable but still not hopeless figure. The men about giggled. They enjoyed it as they enjoyed a bull-baiting, a cock fight, or the trouble of any weaker thing.

The Cardinal awfully proceeded:

“Had you consulted the King’s Majesty he would have accepted your submission and advanced you, and that wise behaviour would have brought you into his high favour and some noble match chosen by him suitable to your degree. But now, see what you have done! You have offended your loving father and matched yourself with such a woman as neither the King nor your father will ever consent to. I will send for your father, who shall either break this foolish bargain or disinherit you for ever. Also the King’s Majesty will speak with your father because he intended to offer Anne Boleyn to another and had indeed almost settled it though she did not know of it. And she will be glad and rejoice when she knows this!”

He stopped, breathless and furious, having succeeded in lashing himself into a fine honest anger. It was as good as if it had been real. The astounded Percy, accustomed to his kindness, stood a moment stunned and then the tears of pure nervous agony rolled down his cheeks. The men, a little jealous of his hitherto favour, giggled again and whispered behind spread hands. They relished his pain like honey or any other sweet thing. One down makes room for another!

He spoke with a broken voice:

“Sir, I did not know the King’s pleasure, and I am sorry. I thought myself of good years and able to choose me a wife, not doubting but my father

would agree. Though she is but a simple maid and her father but a knight, still she is of right noble parentage, for her mother was high of the Norfolk blood and her father descended from the Earl of Ormond. I beseech your Grace's favour in this and to entreat the King's Majesty for his princely good will."

But the Cardinal raged. He turned to Cavendish, one of the men present and a hot admirer of Anne's.

"Look at this wilful boy! Surely I thought you would have turned at once and put yourself in the King's mercy."

Percy clenched distracted hands.

"And so I would but that I have gone so far before many witnesses that I cannot in honour retreat and save my conscience."

Wolsey turned on him with a swoop.

"And do you think the King and I do not know how to manage such matters? But I see no submission in you!"

Alas, for Anne's champion. Yet what could he do? Authority was all against him, and Fear sat pale in his soul. Submission now—perhaps his father—perhaps some way out later! He submitted, and Wolsey towered above him.

"Resort no more to her company unless you will dare the King's indignation."

The Cardinal swept into his room followed by half the grinners. The others remained to torture Percy. All would be spies. Perhaps that was why they were to be witnesses of his humiliation. He dared not see her to tell her that all their hopes were in the dust. He could but write and own himself vanquished and so wait the coming of his father riding furiously from the North on Wolsey's command. There was a long secret communication between Wolsey and Northumberland, he wearied and frightened and ready to explode at a touch in any direction which served his interest at the Cardinal's command.

Grimy still from the road, the dust scarce washed down with a cup of Wolsey's good wine in him to fire his zeal, he sent for the young man who stood before him cap in hand, death-pale and trembling, waiting for doom. It came.

Threats, fury, coarsest abuse of Anne and himself—a hurricane of words before he turned his back on him and strode off to be rowed down the Thames to Sion House. No need to record a weak proud man's avenging his

own discomfiture on his son! And after all, he thought—the beggarly Boleyns had offered little with the girl, and the other girl was a slut.

Percy was conquered, but by forces which no man could dare withstand.

She stood with his letter in her hand and showed it to George in bitter silence. He read it, flushing a little.

“The King?” he asked.

“Not he! The Cardinal. For what reason I know not. But may God abandon me in the day of my sharpest need if I do not watch and wait and take my chance to be revenged on him! The upstart swollen mongrel!”

“The Cardinal!” said George with his lifted lip. “Let the ant attack the elephant! What can you do?”

Again she was silent. It was the downfall of all her hopes. And a further blow fell swiftly. The Queen no longer desired her attendance. She could retire to Hever. All her arts, graces, and struggles were water poured in the sand. The Queen of Whims was dethroned, the Revellers disbanded. All was finished. Some were sorry for the quick brief sparkle of gaiety to be shrouded so soon in gloom. More rejoiced. Again it made room for those at the bottom! Holding her head proudly, Simonette thoughtful beside her, Anne rode down to Hever. She might have had a stolen word with Percy but scorned it. The coward, the fool! She had forgotten the man already. All her anger rushed in a driven flame on the Cardinal. She loathed him. It was of him she dreamed and mused but never of Percy. Humiliated but prouder than ever, cold, bitter as death where she had been a prettily perilous young beauty, she now became dangerous. Brooding, silent, enduring the taunts and scorn with a smouldering fire in her eyes, sullen and apathetic, she drowsed like a snake in winter hoarding venom. Sudden thunder had broken and stunned her.

Only Simonette said in her ear:

“Wait, Anne, wait.”

“The Forsaken Lady,” indeed!

Chapter Eight

SPRING came again garlanded with young green and flowers, and Hever blossomed into beauty that could not soothe Anne's scorched pride. She who had climbed so high to be thrust down and lie in the dust of oblivion, and the gay world to take its way without her! George, still in London, somewhat precariously hanging on at Court, the Revellers forgotten, was courting a girl whose name meant nothing to Anne beyond a fortune. That was acceptable, for George was tiring of haunting other men's or his father's board and needed some mainstay; but bad inasmuch as it made Anne the loneliest of girls. Mary was married to her Carey—and, oddly enough, with some semblance of Court favour. The Queen had shown kindness and had given her countenance. Perhaps she had her orders to pour a little oil into the Boleyn wounds—who could tell? Anyhow, she did it, and the pair were rubbing along in a little Court place little noticed by George, who never went near them. He had no use for portionless love.

Percy, thrust by Wolsey, dragged by his father, scourged by the King's sour words, had lately been wedded to the great match of his family's ambition—the Lady Mary Talbot, daughter of the Earl of Shrewsbury.—She, a narrow-faced sharp-eyed vixen of bluest blood, he, a broken man, they trailed off together to reap the harvest of a bitter sowing.

Bitter also for Anne. When that news came and all hope lay dead she wasted no time in strewing roses upon its bier. She said to Simonette, who stood combing her long black-brown hair:

“All is over. I shall write to my friends in France and leave England for ever and ever. But set all your wits to work, Simonette. Find out the Cardinal's grudge. Find out how he had power to set King and Queen against me, for I have sworn on my knees not once but a hundred times that I will neither accept the viaticum nor die confessed until I have paid him in his own coin and made him drink of the cup he poured for me. May it scald his throat as it has mine!”

With that sentiment Simonette could be in full sympathy though her surface was smoother. If Anne broke in ripples Simonette was the heart-

hiding deep beneath. She answered with consideration:

“How natural that you should so feel and speak, Anne! Indeed you have been sorely handled. But, for me, I would not yet write to France.”

Anne was fiercely determined.

“I am sick of my father’s taunts and his wife’s dull eyes on me. She has not spat in my face, and for that I thank her, but none the less I am stale meat here—stale as Mary! O yes, I could marry. Twice Wyatt has ridden down to bid for me, and twice I have driven him off. Say no more—I will write.”

The driving thought was on her at the moment that perhaps both with Wolsey and the King use had been made of her devil’s marks to set Percy against her. Were they likely to have spared her? No.—She was one set apart.

Write she did and was certain of her answer. There would always be a place for her in France. Gifts like hers do not go begging where quick French wits can enjoy them. Only the mean spiritless English, as she called them, could make such graces Court exiles.

Having written she wandered bare-headed into the green world without. May held high festival—the may-trees were sweet and the branches drifted heavy as snow. Great lilacs tossed opulent blooms into the air and all the horse-chestnuts had lit their white candles. Sweet, sweet, blinding sweet to an aching heart that held no May within! She went slowly through the herb-garden where Mary had gathered mint and vervain so long ago, and then into the wild sweet greenery beyond—slowly because there was nothing to hurry for between dawn and set of the long interminably bright May day.

Down the grass ways under arching boughs heavy with leafage she trailed her white dress flowered with green, sweeping the herbage and thinking bitter thoughts. A quarter of a mile from the castle she idly watched men riding towards her. What matter? It might be Wyatt. Again, what matter? Not a pulse thrilled. Men went and came at Hever and left her dull.

The foremost turned and dismissed the other two and rode slowly on as if to meet her. She did not see. Her eyes were on the ground now, her thoughts in France. Strange to ride again through the gay narrow streets of Paris.—Strange——

A horse stopped by her. A man threw his leg over the saddle and dismounted. She looked up. The King.

She had not thought after such long months of dulling-down that such a flame of hatred could spring in her as shot out of her eyes when she saw him. But for him it could never have been. He had promised all and fulfilled

nothing. She dropped on her knees on the grass as much to hide her face as because from Court etiquette she could do no less. He slung the bridle over his arm, and the patient horse stood drooping with great eyes after hard riding and longed to crop the juicy grass and could not.

The King spoke first.

“Lady of my Revellers——” She shuddered away from him still on her knees. He turned and slung the bridle over a noble bough of beech leaves. The horse, contented, cropped, and the man turned and raised the kindling woman.

“Sweetheart, the very one I would have met! For you I have ridden to Hever. I let time pass, for I knew your dear heart wild with anger against fate. But in England *I* am fate, and I have ridden to bring you comfort.”

She stood like a woman of snow with shut lips and anger burning in her that presently would melt the snow to some purpose but not in tears. She could not yet guess his meaning, for once before he had called her “Sweetheart” as lightly as a man sticks a flower in a girl’s bosom. It dies there and he goes on. And the very sight of Henry the King revolted her. Richly dressed, lusty, prosperous, making and unmaking as he would, and she withering with disgrace in Hever!

“Speak to me, sweeting, I have wearied for the sound of your voice. Did I not know you were discomfited?—but even I could not stir then! It was needful Percy should wed the vinegar-faced Talbot. My Lord Cardinal had his reasons, and my wife was in it, and a tangle not now to be easily unravelled. But thinking on your little dark dear face—Oh the great eyes!—I have known I loved you. And the Court is dead without you. Against me have no blame! See—see what I have brought you. Besides my heart. See!”

He lugged out of his breast, awkwardly enough, a gold chain with some jewel attached but she would not see it—could not have told what it was. She pushed the hand that held it from her as fearless of the man as if she had been Queen and he her subject, and looked him in the face with eyes where the yellow sparkles danced like fire.

“Sire, I am sick at heart and in body. I have no relish for love-making even with the King’s Grace. I am not my sister Mary—I am not for any man’s taking or leaving, and I have tasted Court favour and know its worth.”

He drew back, half amazed, blundering, protesting “an entanglement”; motives he himself could not know. She cut across his words haughtily—the wild falcon, proud of wing and with dangerous darting eyes.

“Entanglement? I do not know.—But if the King’s Grace cannot cut cobwebs how is he fate in England? When I knelt your Grace said, ‘Ask and have,’ and I asked nothing but to please you. And I was cast out like a leper. Put not your trust in princes, said a prince who had cause to know their minds. I am your Majesty’s very humble servant, but I am sick in heart and body. My father will loyally welcome you to Hever. Not I.”

He knelt—and not without difficulty, for he certainly had not the habit and his leg resented it. He would have caught her about the waist with both arms but she escaped them and stood away, pale and panting as much with rage as fear—for indeed that startled her. But the pride in her was unbroken, and her quick wrath could not spare him.

“May it please the King’s Grace, I am not worth a King’s kneeling, but I am worth my own honour to myself. I do not know the Cardinal’s grudge to me, but this I say, that if it could shoulder out a poor girl whose crime was only to make her King happy and the King raise no hand to save her, why then my Lord Cardinal is the greatest man in England, and what happened once may happen twice! I take my disgrace as from your Majesty’s hand and so accept it. There is no more to say.”

The drowsy sound of the horse’s contented cropping was the only one that broke the silence, for the beech-leaves did not so much as lift. She did not look at the King but turned and went quickly away towards the great old house. She had shot her first arrow at Wolsey, and a not unpointed one.

Henry got slowly to his feet and watched her graceful retreating back. None walked like Anne, with an easy gliding motion that was softly flowing music. It would not be worth a word at such a moment but that it soothed the anger in him. A woman like that was herself a queen and had rightly matched her royalty against his own. For a heart’s beat and for the first time in his life he too hated Wolsey. How clumsily, coarsely, and suddenly he had struck! A case where the finest *finesse* of French fencing would have served, and he had rushed into it like a bull, goring and tossing. Thank the Omnipotent she could not know what lay behind his clumsiness! She must never know. But as for blaming Wolsey—what more natural? He would win her of course—how otherwise?—but he must *finesse* and use a delicacy not natural to him. He must bear thwarting because there was none like her and, the poor darling!—she would have shame to bear for him when fruition came and would feel it bitter. He had realized in those few minutes that he dared not again put her all smarting and burning about the Queen. She might speak her fearless mind as incautiously as to him who loved her. No, he must hide his jewel as he had hid those who now seemed worthless beside

her glow and sparkle of wit and cold fiery chastity of body. In that at least she had made him believe.

Perhaps the thought of the struggle to come pleased as much as it piqued him. He would match his strength against hers and bring her to his arms, bitter-sweet, fighting against her life, and then drown her in kisses and splendours and have his way and strike fire from her heart as cold as diamond and as hard. Flint and steel and——

Softly thudding steps on the grass. Sir Thomas, bare-headed, with a somewhat forced smile not quite adapting itself to his lips. He knelt as in duty bound.

“Welcome, my liege, to Hever, and a thousand welcomes for an honour done to a humble servitor. My daughter Anne is sick—she has had fits of swooning since she came from Court and could but tell me before she fell and we carried her to her chamber that your Grace was here alone. I beseech you to honour us——”

Henry had regained his bluff self-possession covering his knowledge that the moment was an awkward one. What had she said? He looked searchingly in Sir Thomas’s face. That worthy had drawn a mask of smiling humility over whatever he might feel, and Henry had perhaps not quite enough imagination to think himself inside the skin of a man whose wife and daughter had already suffered smartly from scandal in the King’s behalf and whose last remaining daughter was in a fair way to follow their example. But there are positions which must be taken for granted. Here was the King seeking hospitality. Here was the loyal subject honoured to offer it. That was all. Again Sir Thomas besought the favour of his presence, and the King knew he had not the power to ride to London and leave his suit in the air.

“The brute is wearied!” he said unslinging the bridle from the bough, “and two of my men are by the gate and the rest at the village alehouse. And I thank my trusty Thomas for his welcome. Shall we walk?”

Anne, breathless in her room, had poured out her story to Simonette. Speak she must or burst, and Simonette was of good counsel and silent as the grave when she so willed.

“And now, look!” says Anne choking and waving her hand to the pleasance, “he comes with my father to treat me as he treated Mary, and may the curse of God wither me if I let him have his way! What!—he could have stopped the red-hatted beast and did not, and I am to sit with his arm about me and sell my fame for his hour’s pleasure! Shameless! What am I to do?”

Simonette pounced upon her and tore at her dress.

“*Mon Dieu!*—You are a thousand times right! The insult! Whip off your clothes and to bed, and we will have in the doctor. Hurry. Certainly you will not see him—King or no king! Is a woman a slave?”

She had Anne in bed in five minutes, her hair spread out on the pillows like a wave of night and her pale face in the midst of it. Mary looms large in the story of her sister Anne, and certainly Simonette, remembering her, knew that a stout resistance enhances victory even as a great price enhances a diamond. Sir Thomas at wine with his royal guest was later informed with concern that Mistress Anne had fallen from one fit of swooning into another, and the doctor had enjoined perfect quiet and a draught of horrible ingredients. Henry stared panting, and the anxious father went up to satisfy his own eyes and returned with a sorrowful report.

“She lies like a new-killed lamb—white and silent. Well, God’s will be done!”

Even a king’s will is halted by the doctor reinforced by the father and Henry stayed the night at Hever and rode back to London next day without any sight of her. She was in a collapse, they said.

Difficult to describe his heart! If she had suffered, at least she made him feel, and the worst was he could neither blame nor forget her. As to Percy, that was nothing, and he could have hated her had she said a word of lamentation for him. But she had not. All was anger at Wolsey and anger at himself for his desertion. He had broken her trust in him both as King and as man, a very torturing thing to him to consider. Kisses apparently would not mend the wound. How should pride meet pride that it could not blame?

Twice again he rode down to Hever, the first time gaining nothing for his pains, for Anne, forewarned by Simonette, had fled to Allington and to the kind bosom of gentle Mary Wyatt. Be sure Wyatt rode down from London, and the more so because Rumour had begun to lift her head and whisper of the King’s second visit to Hever. Kings cannot flit bat-like in the dark.

But neither Wyatt nor the King got any good of Anne. She had not known herself how hurt pride and loathing can darken the world, and besides, there began to be now and under Simonette’s fostering a ray of scornful joy that the man who had thrown her to the wolves should kneel in vain.

The second time, she was at Blickling, it seemed, and in his thwarted fever the King meditated riding to far off Blickling and dared not. Dared not! She had been wronged. The situation was most delicate with the two

former scandals awaking again as the world saw that Hever drew him. He might drag her to his feet, but again he dared not.—Public repulse would be unthinkable, and he knew her wild and fiery as an unbroken mare with glancing eye to discover the danger and heels to kick and plunge and carry her off in safety. He was almost mad with love's rage when once again he rode down to Hever, this time sending an intimation before him not to be disobeyed.

But she was furious. By now her French retreat was secured, and she felt she owed him nothing. What was Jericho or its like to her? She must receive him but—she consulted again and often with Simonette. Simonette bent her brows on it and thought hard.

“He is flame-mad for you, Anne, and such madness does not outlast possession with any man. With some men it settles into a household fire that you may warm your feet at and boil your kettle for a few years, but he is not so but a choleric lustful angry man woman-spoilt by Sovereignty. It is this, and you can choose one of two chances. Either make him bid high now. Ask what you will and surrender, having gained great good for your people and yourself, and be paid off and cast off,—but fat with gold and jewels, or—hold out. Fly—to conquer.”

“To conquer? But how? What?” Anne's eyes were wide with amaze. “What more could I have of him? He has no more to give.”

Simonette rose and leaned against the window, looking down the way by which the King must come. She did not look at Anne.

“The Queen's health is broken. She can neither have a son nor live long years. I have it from a sure hand. Now a few kind words cost little, and France is far and safe, and a tender thought sown in a man's heart springs green and blossoms. If I were Anne Boleyn——”

But Anne Boleyn sat speechless, staring at the tapestry on the wall—mossy green and grey and faded figures of Diana and her nymphs pursuing nimble deer. Impossible! Mad! But though mad and with nothing to come of it perhaps the best way to escape an intolerable situation. And once in France she could please herself and watch events. But as to believing his fidelity would survive any such trial—absurd! No—she would marry a gold and velvet Frenchman as once had been her dream, and if the French fought the English some fine day she could forgive them, for England had brought her no good.

Presently Simonette said:

“You see?” (They were speaking French, as they did that no greedy ears should glean a word.)

“I see an escape in it but no more. What you think is a madwoman’s fancy.”

“Yet if by any mad chance I were right, what I think could only come by your half yielding now and escaping to where he cannot reach you.”

“And that is true. There’s nothing in it. Such things do not happen but in poetry. Still, it is good counsel. I see that well. You are a wise woman. Sometimes I think you are wiser than I know.”

Simonette only smiled.

“Now let me dress you in all your beauty. The Hever air has made you blossom and glitter.”

She dressed her in velvet—her favourite red-brown approaching the colour of claret on the lees. It was sown about the deeply square-cut bosom with the garnets which had served so many a turn, and a wound chain of the same hid the small goitrous protuberance with red fire.

“Can it be seen?” Anne asked eagerly. It was only to Simonette she ever spoke of that little hidden shame, and the answer “Not it!” reassured her, because Simonette was blunt as a club when it served her turn or Anne’s. Therefore she was Anne’s looking-glass and a true one, and when Anne went slowly down the long stair she was a soldier who had felt her sword’s edge and knew it true and keen.

Henry sat in the little room he knew and had chosen—a garden-room with earliest roses about it and a scent of lilacs that did not need the great bow-pots on the casement-sill to help their perfume.

He rose to meet her, and that he had not meant to do for he was angry with her and more angry with himself because he could not keep away. The minute before she came he could have struck her with the flat of his hand and kissed her after.

But when she came, with eyes bent on the ground and then raised sorrowfully to his, he saw a new Anne—not joyous, no lover, but with a sweet sad composure,—which promised an ear to the pleading of reason—or love?

Henry led her to a chair by his and looking at her a moment said slowly:

“I have come often. I shall come no more unless—— Sweet mistress, is it forgiveness?”

She sank on her knees before him and hid her face in her hands like a woman who makes confession to God.

“I will tell your Grace my heart—a poor heart but mine. It is I that ask forgiveness. I mistrusted your good and benign sovereignty because you did not lift your hand to save a miserable girl from the consequence of her own folly. What I did I know not, but if it was displeasing to a great wise man like my Lord Cardinal sure it was unwise, to say the least! I abjure my fault though I know it not. I accept my chastisement, and I will pray your Grace to be my intercessor for his benediction and forgiveness. O, I have suffered!”

This had the quality of womanly submission which tempered by her wild graces was the sure way to his heart. Beauty yielding on her knees. It had the merit also of hindering any quest of hers as to the intricacies of the situation and tracing the fly’s destruction to the Master-spider seated at the heart of the cobweb. Also, Wolsey was his right hand and conscience. His blessing should certainly be desired!

He raised the lovely penitent in his arms and set her in her chair, wishing it were his knee and nothing doubting that would follow. But he held both her hands in his.

“Could sweetest be sweeter thus it would be, my heart! Truly the Cardinal is wise and my sword to do my will, and therefore all English hearts should serve him—in reason. And now, let the past be past and tell me—have I ridden in vain to Hever like any knight errant who seeks his lady-love? For, knowing my suit, you know that a king loves you and his heart kneels at your feet.”

It was an occasion when eyes speak better than the tongue and are less committal. They cannot, at least, be quoted afterwards. She raised them and looked him in the face,—not hardly, but steadfastly and with a mournful tenderness.

“Sir, I have made your Majesty my confessor. I will therefore tell you for truth by the faith of my body and soul that Percy I never loved—I loved Love and Alnwick and pride, but not the man. And, had I loved him, most surely his easy forsaking of me would have shamed me out of it. So past is past. But in this bitter lesson of the world’s vanity I have learnt that Love is a mighty master, and until he constrains me with whip and torment I will be no man’s slave—for when I love, slave I shall be. I am thus made. I will walk free and my own heart in my own hand until love I am forced to against my will.”

Exquisite art. She shone bright and cold as a star in winter heavens—yet more desirable than anything on the dull sordid earth. His arms went about her, his face violent and flushed with passion burned against hers, and yet, strained in that close embrace, she was cool, virginal, unwon. Men at Court were wagering on the fair Boleyn's yielding this time. Wyatt, at Allington, in an agony counted her lost. But the King, holding her in his arms, knew her neither his nor any man's. Heavenly comfort at the moment the latter! but the truth went further than he could have desired. The last stronghold stormed she would never be any man's, for she was wholly her own, prisoner in her own cage, and no love could pick that lock. She lay there awhile, breathing softly and evenly as though she rested, and at long last murmured:

“Heavenly sweet to know myself forgiven by my dread Sovereign and excellent good Master.”

“Forgiven? I love you. Till you are mine the world darkens. Sweet, you tell me you loved Alnwick and power. Then stretch your dear hands and take both from a king. What is the whipped hound Percy to that? And——”

Very softly she interrupted, with a hand laid on his breast.

“But, your Majesty, I said also that I must love. I do not know my heart—I wait my Master. And whereas you offer me power and riches—Percy offered me with them one thing your Highness can never offer nor I dare to take—a little gold ring. To a pure woman—and I dare call myself one—my honour is dear as your kingly honour to you. Therefore do not, I beseech your Grace, press me to what would blot me out for ever to my own good,—and little further your joy. Dishonoured, I should be but a dead woman!”

She sighed wearily in ending. Not press her? There was no pressure he did not use. But still, cool and sweet, she eluded him—a vanishing tearful rainbow. She had been ill in body, her strength was failing, she said at the end of a stormy hour. And he was powerless. The man was mad with desire, and yet some perception transpierced it that could he carry her off by violence then and there he would not have attained that desire. It was something neither in her power to grant until some secret spring was moved in her nor his to accept. It was beyond them both. Finally, he sat holding her upon his knees while she lay victorious but almost collapsed against him.

“Sweeter than all sweet,” he said, most tenderly. “Let time be our friend. I will strive for patience, a virtue God knows I never owned, and you to know your dear heart. Sometimes I will ride here and I will most deeply consider of what you have said. Nor shall you doubt that I honour your maidenly shamefastness. But kings suffer like meaner men, and the more

that in certain ways they are more bound. Now, as you love me, sweetheart, go to your chamber and rest, and I will speak with your father and ride to London. But write to me as I to you, and so shall Love's bonds be iron between us."

So they parted. She had given him no kiss while he had lavished many. —Yet he was nearer, he thought, to his heart's longing. She had condescended to parley, and he recalled the French cynicism.

*"Château qui parle
Femme qui écoute!"—*

Yes, she had listened.

A week later came messengers from London bearing a magnificent gift of jewels for her. She slung a string of pearls in her hand—true Orient. On a chain of wrought gold swung a pendant of square diamonds with pendant diamonds. It had been his grandmother's, the lovely Elizabeth Woodville's. She had seen it on Katharine's bosom. There were great diamond and ruby rings. The little table in her bedroom was all sparkle and glitter, and Simonette gloated above her. Even had she wished to return them she dared not, but she did not wish. Also, already she tasted the family sunshine of approval, at first doubtful then mellowing and grateful, induced by the presence of the lady the King delighted to honour. So far as Sir Thomas could understand the case he considered Anne had shown both wisdom and skill. The fatted calf was killed in her praise. She was the pride of his declining years. A good—a worthy daughter! And more was to come. News came that for his eminent services to the King as Ambassador to France and Treasurer to the Household he was preferred to the peerage under the style and title of Viscount Rochford—an honour particularly grateful because it was a title of the Ormonds, to whom he was proud to be related. And more yet was to follow. Even the docile Mary was to bloom into some sort of prosperity. Her William Carey was appointed gentleman of the Privy Chamber. That debt was honourably cancelled.

My Lord Rochford strutted and trumpeted in the bosom of his own family. Outside it his manner was reserved and collected. A gracious king who, unasked, graciously rewarded loyal service! The Court sniggered—men and women. Had she? Had she not? Would she? Would she not? Deep suspense awaited the last act of the drama.

But Wyatt, awhile in retirement at Allington, musing on his lost love, not venturing to Hever, so much was it now a part of the royal domain, wrote bitter verses and sent them to Anne. He knew they would touch certain

strings in her never to be dumb in life. It was his way of climbing to the star—now glittering over Europe.

*Whoso desires to hunt—I know where is a hind!
But, as for me, alas! I can no more,
The vain pursuit has wearied me so sore.
I am of them that farthest come behind,
Yet not, by any means, my wearied mind
Draw from the deer, but, as she flees before
Fainting I follow. I leave off therefore
Since in a net I cannot hold the wind.
Who would her hunt—(I put him out of doubt
As well as I)—will spend his time in vain.
And graven with diamonds, with letters plain
Is written on her fair neck round about
“No man shall touch me. Cæsar’s own I am,
And wild I am to hold, though I seem tame.”*

He sent it to her, and she set it side by side with her jewels and smiled. “Wild to hold” she knew herself and would be wilder. Yet she wrote to him most sweetly—moved to deep regret and tenderness—not hopeless. No lover of Anne’s was ever hopeless;—none ever rewarded in truth. And Wyatt hoped. Love is a game at which kings have been conquered not seldom.

Meanwhile the King wrote also, almost like a madman. In an age when letters were labours he wrote often and in French for the greater secrecy.

TO MY MISTRESS,

As the time seems very long since I heard from you or concerning your health the great love I have for you constrains me to send this bearer to be better informed of your health and pleasure, especially because, since my last parting with you I have been told you have entirely changed the mind in which I left you and that you neither mean to come to Court with your mother nor in any other way. And it seems hard in reward of the great love I bear you to be kept at a distance from the person and presence of the woman in the world that I value the most. And if you loved me with as much affection as I hope you do I am sure that the distance would be as painful to you—though this is not so much the Mistress’s part as the servant’s. Consider well, my Mistress, how greatly your absence grieves me. I hope it is not your will it should be so, but if I heard for certain you yourself desire it I could but mourn my ill fortune and strive by degrees to lessen my folly.

Written by the hand of your entire servant. H. R.

She marked the hint but still wrote sweetly and coolly. What could she do? Neither her heart nor the circumstances were in her control. But even if her heart were so—she must not, dare not, give it a loose. That was her hint in return for his. He wrote again and often:

By revolving in my mind the contents of your last letters I have put myself into great agony. I beseech you earnestly to let me know your real mind as to the love between us two. It is necessary for me to have this answer from you having been for a whole year wounded with the dart of love and not yet assured of finding a place in your heart and love. But if you please to do the duty of a true and loyal mistress and give yourself up heart and body to me who will be, as I have been, your most loyal servant, I promise you that not only the name shall be given you, but also that I will take you for my mistress casting off all others that are in competition with you and serving you only. If it does not please you to answer me in writing let me know some place where I may have it by word of mouth and I will go there with all my heart.

Written by the hand of him who would willingly remain your
H. REX.

Rex! That letter was the crucial one in the midst of many others. Furthermore, it enclosed a poem of his own composing which strengthened its emphasis.

*The eagle's force subdues each bird that flies.
What metal can resist the flaming fire?
Doth not the sun dazzle the clearest eyes
And melt the ice and make the frost retire?
The hardest stones are pierced through with tools.
The wisest are with princes made but fools.*

She took both to Simonette, her constant counsellor, and the two sat, heads together.

“Now you are at the cross-roads,” said Simonette. “The King speaks here as well as the lover. In the last line the lover is forgotten and you have your threat! Therefore, now choose! You are sure of the lesser prize. Will you stake for the great one? You must front it now.”

For hours they sat over it, weighing, balancing, alternately terrified and hopeful. Almost Simonette yielded at last, saying—“Perhaps best to take

what you can get.” But Anne, wild of heart, surer of her charm and his passion, threw the dice finally for flight.

“I can always come back,” she said,—“I will go to France.”

She wrote the sweetest letter to her crowned servant. Her fears so dragged her that it would be death to stay. Away and at leisure she would know her own destiny—to love or to die. Therefore she was entering the service of the royal Duchess of Alençon. She would write. She would—— But who does not know such letters?—though it may be owned a better one was never written nor can be. Henry was left in an agony incomprehensible even to himself but impossible to escape as the lasso of the skilled hunter. His very struggles tightened it. The Court gaped in blank amazement. George smiled. Wyatt neither smiled nor gaped. He had dissected Anne. He knew.

Chapter Nine

FOR a time all was silent as though a bellowing storm had died in grey twilight. Outraged carnality in Henry sent him through all the changes of which that one voice is capable, furies of balked desire, for he had staked all on her yielding, tossing nights, galled and bitter days, sordid humiliation, the man cheated and defeated by the wiles of a false jilt. But there is more in any man than that one voice can express, and presently he was aware of another mingling with it deeper and more implacable, mysterious because unknown and almost incredible to him. A grief alien to his own desires, grief for the delicate creature he had broken. In the first mood, had she been inside the borders of his realm he would have dragged her to his breast and taken the chance. Now he thought of her far from him, quivering with loss and pain, hoarding her maidenhood for her soul's sake as a pure woman must.

“Can I be a traitor to my good mistress the Queen—even if there were nothing else?” she had sighed with eyes distilling slow tears,—and he, was he her destroyer? For the power of the English King stops with the English Channel, and what shield had this girl to save her from all the cruelties of fate and man? And this voice coming from some unknown region in his soul darkened the day. The Court was dully empty to him as a child's drained sawdust doll, and pleasure had fled at her heels leaving heaviness behind it. The feeble startled band of the Revellers incited by Mark Smeaton and Surrey with Brereton (a newcomer and merry mime) and Norris and Weston gathered themselves together and made an essay or two at hilarity, but George Boleyn kept doubtfully away—he could have predicted the end—and plot as they would they could not lift their Master's heavy jaws into a smile. He chose to be with them—perhaps some faint perfume of her presence still lingered about the group, but the grace and swift sparkle were exchanged for deep drinking and ribald stories, and though women were handed about, and freely, showering facile smiles and favours, winter was come and Henry was forced to realize that through something in either her or himself—and were not both one?—it was she alone who had outrun the rude boasting revelling fettered spirit of the old days and lifted the gaiety of

the Court of England all but to a parity with that of France and halfway to what he could decipher of the freedoms of Italy through George and Wyatt. And this was the elfin arrowy sweetness which he had ridden down to Hever to woo under May boughs and had only outraged! The fair falcon's wings had melted into the blue, and there remained to him his bloated coarseness of the past struggling to ravish the liberty and taunting exquisiteness of the new day. How inevitably she had evaded him!

He opened a part of his mind to Wolsey, but not all. It may be said that Wolsey was but the confidant of the grasping egoism of the sensual man, but not of the misgivings and terror of the other man hidden in depths unsounded even by himself.

"A mad girl—a fool, a jilt! And to dare to use her master so!" Henry said. "If she had a thousand chastities all were mine by right, I swear to God! What woman in England is not mine if I turned my eyes that way? Do you sit there staring like a calf with its throat cut and tell me that France will dare to keep her if I demand the return of my fled subject? Never!"

And Wolsey echoed, "Never." Indeed his brain was already working on the problem, for the change in Henry frightened him and made political team-work with him a menace. The King hated France because Anne was sunning herself there amongst gay men and women like-minded and Wolsey needed his liking for France. The French Court was flaring with splendour that year to welcome Francis the King returned from his Spanish captivity. From the French Ambassador it was not difficult to learn that Mistress Anne Boleyn shed her graces on the revels—a bright moon over subject waves—and Wolsey knew neither how to assuage nor direct Henry's bitterness. The King had sent her father again to France on a diplomatic mission but also with the charge to bring the girl back with him, and my Lord Rochford wrote frankly to Wolsey of her disobedience.

"Her father despairs of her," Wolsey, racked with questioning, was obliged to admit. "He says that she refuses flatly to come and that though he would be willing to drag her by the hair of the head to pleasure your Highness she steadfastly declares that if so provoked she will marry a French noble, of which God knows many would be willing, and so make herself French. And he can do no more."

"And you also can no more?" Henry asked bitterly. "In truth I am well served, and it takes but a girl to defy King and Cardinal! It is the Almighty's mercy there are not many such, or you and I would be in the muck-heap and she on the throne."

“But, my liege, I have considered,” Wolsey said eagerly, “and I believe there is a way,—namely that Thomas Boleyn should move the King of France to force his daughter to obedience by handing her over to him and forbidding her the French Court. Then she must needs come, for she is not one to languish in villages, and this I think must succeed if it meets your gracious pleasure.”

Henry laughed a loud and scornful laugh.

“A fine trickster, you! I tell you, man, she is one to stick a knife in her breast sooner than give any man the mastery. She is wild as a hind in season. I will think of it further, but I tell you this—it is you, *you* who drove her into rebellion! Why could you not do your business like a gentleman with Percy, but must drive her mad with injustice? You did it—you alone! Undo it, if you can, and if not be silent.”

Wolsey heard with his eyes downcast. These angers were not unknown to him in other fields—but for a mere wench’s favour! He brooded heavily over it. In herself she was nothing. Through the King she was much and he must regain her good opinion. In a letter to her father he lamented Mistress Anne’s absence from Court and the dearth caused by loss of her merriment and harmony. He sent her his benediction and a ring of a rich table-emerald, commending himself to her memory. He needed no commendation to her memory. Simonette could have told him—had he consulted the woman wisest in the case—that tenacious as he himself might be his tenacity scarcely equalled Anne’s. She turned pale with hatred when she thought of the Enemy (as she always called him now) and the loud hectoring humiliation he had inflicted upon her. He poisoned her meat and drink with his venom. Who could tell that even to the French Court his long broom might not reach and sweep the diligent spider and her silken web again into oblivion?

She carried the letter to Simonette when her father put it into her hands beseeching her to consider her ways and walk most warily. More he dared not do, because she who had been right once might again be right, and the falcon was towering in France as in England. Was he not Lord Rochford? Was not George at Court, and Mary settled? Alone she had done it. But all he besought from her was astucity while he wrote to Wolsey in the character of the threatening father doing his outrageous best to break her.

Striking her finger on the letter when she had read it to Simonette she said coolly:

“You see? I was right. When I told George that some day I would make the Enemy smart for his pains he fleered at me and talked of the ant and the

elephant. O, a great bloated beast, I grant you, with his cross in his hand, but he fears, he fears! Would he have sent this emerald for love's sake? Laugh, Simonette; the blossom ripens to fruit!"

Even Simonette could hardly believe her eyes. In her mind the Cardinal, as to all in England and many in Europe, was the one fortress that none but Death could break or bend. The King was mighty but fitful; the Cardinal pursued always a silent but unchanged path charted by himself and remained unmoved.

"It is a marvellous triumph!" she said awed. "But go warily, Anne. He may seem to relent but——"

"Relent! The King forced him!" said Anne through her teeth. "I would I had been there unseen! The King has said, 'Get her back!' and the Enemy cringed and swore obedience."

She made to put the ring on her finger, but Simonette caught it back.

"For our blessed Lady's sake, Anne,—no—no! Have you not heard of a slow poison in rings that kills the wearer? Why, it is a trade in Italy and surer than a perfumed glove. Drop it, woman!"

But it was the pride in Anne that made her thrust her finger into it, and there it gleamed baleful fire.

"He would not dare. The King would find a shorter way for him than a poisoned ring. No, Simonette, that is nothing to me. It is— Shall I keep the ring? Shall I send my answer? What? Think with me."

Simonette, still eying the ring doubtfully, considered.

"The King has not written a word or sent a token by this courier?"

"Nothing—but George writes that the Court is leaden and the King heavier except when like a thunder-cloud he breaks in lightning. Then all hide their heads until the air clears. And George says—but darkly—that very soon the fruit will be ripe, and ripe fruit too long left goes over-ripe."

"That is true!"

"And of himself he says that marriage is a hard life and if it is made in heaven they are mighty quick to be rid of it on earth, and make no use of that sacrament themselves, as is well said in the Scriptures. So now?"

"He says true," said Simonette thoughtfully, "both as to marriage and over-ripe fruit, with all my soul I wish we had the King's mind from himself."

Anne looked steadily at the green fire on her finger.

“Until I know that, they shall not get me if they drag me with ropes. I may know.”

And Henry sitting alone, sourly absent from the Queen and Wolsey, knew within his very soul that cart-ropes would not meet his need. Had he not held her on his knees, clasped to his breast and yet a world away? Not till their two wills according made one whole could there be union. As well kiss a corpse, like the outcasts who mummy the dead Egyptian women, as take her thus. Did she yet know her own heart and what was its answer?

And Wolsey would have given York House and all its treasures to reclaim her;—recklessly with both hands would he have given! even as he had given his palace of Hampton Court to the King. For he knew that love is the only poison that is its own antidote when swallowed to the dregs of possession. Let her come and be done with! She could not come too soon.

Then, at long last, Henry passed through the orbit of lethargy, flame, and exhaustion of mind, unable to withhold or endure longer the King wrote. Weary couriers, foundering horses galloping through France brought his letter.

MY MISTRESS AND MY FRIEND,

My heart and I surrender ourselves into your hands and we supplicate to be commended to your good graces and that by absence your affections may not be diminished to us. For that would be to make our pain greater since absence gives enough pain and even more than I ever believed could be felt. Absence has set a distance between us, nevertheless fervour increases—at least with me. I hope the same from you, assuring you that in my case the anguish of absence is so great that I could not endure it were it not for the firm hope I hold of your unbreakable affection for me. To remind you—because I cannot myself be with you—I send you the nearest thing, which is my picture and the whole device set in bracelets, wishing I were in their place, when they please you.

Your servant and friend

H. R.

She read it, first breathless, then, crushing it together with the bracelets, fled to Simonette stitching a dress of white velvet slashed with white satin.

“Read—read!”

Simonette sprang up, and the dress slipped forgotten to the floor. She knew!

“He! *Dieu de Dieu!* Show!”

She snatched it from Anne, who sat staring alternately at the picture in the one bracelet and the royal device on the other, the fleurs-de-lis and lean lions still bearing the likeness of their leopard origin. Some lesser artist had copied the miniature from a great picture of Holbein’s known then and now over Europe and had dropped some false joviality on the way and perhaps more accurately picked up the man. He stared at something below him immobile as though considering it indifferently with eyes like drowsing snakes lurking in thick lids.

She noted the great cheeks bulging from under the cheek-bones, the small cruel sensual mouth cut clean of the surrounding reddish beard. A flat velvet hat with curling ostrich plume hid the thinning hair beneath. The face had overlaid its architecture with flesh, not wholesome, the eyebrows arched like a satyr’s but without whimsicality and humour. She stared at it. Could she? Away from him, released, it seemed impossible to enter the prison of his arms and dominant crushing desire. No—no, never! And yet—the painter had given a hint of royal ermine stiffly outstanding from the shoulders. The royal collar of the Garter lay glittering upon it. The glimpse of the tunic was stiff with jewels. Her look fell on the bracelets. Stiff also with jewels set in rough gold they were like fetters. She could see thick fingers handling them, clasping them on slim wrists.

“Wishing myself in their place when they please you.”—

But did they please her?

Simonette looked up:

“Victory. O—*Mon Dieu! Sainte Vierge!*—what bracelets! What jewels!”

She spoke in exclamations, giddy with success.

Anne said slowly:

“And you would have me set off tomorrow for Calais? Well then, I will not—any more than I would send a message to the Enemy! Let them stoop lower. And even then I will only consider it.”

Simonette shook her head. Anne stood like a warrior.

“You dare not? Then I dare. And I will dare more. But I will keep the bracelets though I must not mark myself ‘sold’ for many a day, if ever. I doubt—I doubt! Is it worth it? Percy was a fool; he is half dying for me. Still, but him I could have ruled. I can bow to no man. My way is my own and I will take it.”

“It appears that you can take it with the King also.”

“Now. But a king is a man with kingship added to lust to make him fool and headstrong,—and it disturbs me. How can I know as I know of other men? No hurry, Simonette! Lock these up, and because the courier waits I will send my devotion and my gratitude and that I am deeply considering his loving and gracious letter.”

She did and with no word of the bracelets—a master-touch. Not to be won by jewels!

On the heels of the last came another letter and another. The man’s torment through the stiff gesture of his words could be felt in every line. He needed her as dying men need air—air. Air that he may live, and without it life impossible. The last she took to Simonette and said with a smile as ironic as George’s:

“And now. At last I have put him through his paces. What of the Queen’s health?”

“Failing—failing!” Simonette cried, clapping her hands. “Delay no more. If she dies—some great political marriage—the Cardinal——”

Anne cut her short.

“Make ready. I have done with doubt.”

A woman about a royal duchess cannot flee to her lover like a servant girl, and she had many ties to break and farewells to say and hopes to lay in ashes. Of the letters she did not speak, and the bracelets were hidden, but there was a quick vibration in her, a feverish gaiety that made the wiser ponder as to what was recalling “the Lady” (as the French Ambassador to England called her in his secret correspondence) to England. The wisest knew. They knew that she had become a European figure, that Wolsey himself was nearly as anxious as his Master for her coming, though not after his fashion. The diplomats considered that her action, her delays, her sagacious withdrawal to France, all built up the character of a woman by no means negligible, one to whom they must bow.

The French King himself knew it. He had dreamed of her in past days before his Spanish captivity. He dreamed of her no longer. He knew her a practical pawn in the great game with England—and perhaps to be more than a pawn.

So, riding with her thankful-hearted yet doubtful father, Anne came by slow marches to Calais, and there a ship met her, not royal yet chosen by an anxious lover who dreaded the wild gales of the Channel. And on board was George, eager for a council of war to consider strategy. And Simonette slid

aboard as though she were nothing, and to her George bowed with a flourish and gave his hand like a friend, estimating her at her value.

But only the two Boleyns were in case for plotting as the King's treasure-ship put out to sea, for the father lay retching in his bed, and they two sat in the poop cabin together speaking French lest any spy should be hidden among the crew or servants.

"Marriage has changed you, George," Anne said, laughter brimming in amber eyes. "You like her no better than I do!"

"Marriage or my wife?" He was in his old attitude, swinging his legs from the table.

"Your wife."

"No—I do not like her. It is not in me to like any woman I marry. To a gentleman the very act is conclusive. But what then? I can live with her—and no bones broken."

"And True Thomas?"

"As to that—married a month since to the family choice. But again, no bones broken so far as fidelity goes. He writes no verses for her. A wife banishes poetry as holy water a devil. He will run to your beckon more swiftly. That is the only difference."

She meditated on that and accepted it.

"And Brereton, Weston, Surrey, Mark Smeaton—what did they say when they knew I was riding for Calais?"

"We had a parliament on it and says Smeaton (most certainly he is the Devil's son by his first marriage with the Flesh!)—'I believe the day comes when Anne can not only crack the Cardinal's crown for him but also the King's crown into the bargain. Here has his Sanctity been bustling about with us all and we may ask and have what we want for our gambols. Suppose she asks for his red hat when next she dances to the King with her new French graces?' They jeer and say you can put the extinguisher on its flame one day if you choose. Will you, Anne?"

"And you—what do you say? You called me the creeping ant and him the trampling elephant. What now?"

"Times change!" said George, "and we with them. And one of the Lombardy merchants in London brought back a story, travelled from I know not where, of ants that banded against an elephant and picked him to the bare bones. Shall we band? Anne, you are grown more beautiful. Your eyes flood your face with light like the brown clearness of a forest pool flecked

with sunlight—do you remember the fern-fringed water at Bydon? That is you.”

“I remember. It is well I am beautiful, for I shall need knives for my enemies. George, let us band! We two are always one—we should have lain side by side in our mother’s womb so one is our heart-beat. Tutor me when I need it. Watch for me. Do not let your wife come between us.”

“My wife!” His contempt needed no more words to buttress it. “Yes—I will watch. And now, Anne,—the King, alone with Surrey and me, speaking of the dead boys the Queen has borne him and only Princess Mary left, said a strange thing. Would we could talk this new Greek of More’s and Colet’s, for I tremble to speak it in French.”

She leaned until cheek touched cheek and his whisper brushed her ear like thistledown.

“He said—surely it was his own fault; that some curse rested on his conscience for he had no peace in it, having married his brother’s wife against the old Jew law in the Bible—and that even then, though it was his father’s, the old King’s, policy, his stomach turned at it. He said, ‘Kindred blood is a foul mixture.’ ”

She drew back that she might look into his eyes, so like her own but profounder and with sarcastic eyebrows that had spoilt a woman’s beauty but gave his edge.

“George!—but impossible! She was never his brother’s wife. She was virgin when he died—a sickly boy—almost a child of sixteen. I have heard our father say it was so sworn and——”

“It was sworn by those who needed it should be so. As to sixteen—— But it is not for us to decide. I say only this—If you are to be keeper of the King’s conscience—and every sweetheart is the keeper of her man’s while it lasts,—you should know how matters stand in that temple of all the virtues! But it is he must speak of his ailment, not you.”

She assented in deep thought. Her eyes glowed.

“And the Queen’s health? Failing?”

“Why, a stout elderly often ailing woman that may see us all out. Build nothing on that.”

A pause.

“And what said True Thomas of my coming?”

“To me—alone—he said, ‘Could she not leave us in peace—if indeed Death’s apathy be peace!’ He loves you, Anne, and when inflamed is

reckless as you are reckless. Go warily. I would he were not in London! I dread lest the two of you strike fire.”

To that she answered nothing, but asked another question.

“And Surrey, Brereton, Norris? Weston?”

“Rejoiced at the fat days of success and victory coming with you. Surrey is a poet. He lives in the clouds. The other three are the Revellers, no more. Do not will-o’-the-wisp them into the bogs!”

They sat talking for two hours and more, with the grey waters of the Channel tossing about them and a ringing home-wind in their sails. All was certainty with those two. Dauntless as the golden Apollo and his golden sister the Huntress, there was nothing they could not do, no prey too fleet or high for their arrows of joy and youth and wit—each arrow tipped with desire and instinct. And yet, though a man, George was near as sexually cold as Anne. He too had less relish for the flesh of the primitive banquet than for the delicate sauces, the wines, fruits, and pretty little tiny kickshaws that growing civilization has added to the simple joys of the greater carnivora. Kindred souls in kindred bodies, those two; cold and yet fiery; sharp yet sweet.

They rode down to Hever, the three, and men posted in Dover took the news to St. James’s, and the King booted and saddled for Kent.

It was bright February weather, and his face was lusty and cold with a north-easterly breeze as he rode under the leafless grey arches of Hever beeches. The way rang frosty under his feet. Before him, for night was darkling down, the great windows cast splashes of ruddy light upon the rime. It was as though the warmth and light within cried, “Welcome to the King,”—a deep-throated welcome. He smiled and his nostrils retracted as blown from the vast kitchens the smell came curling down of roasting venison, rich gravies and cullises, mighty pasties, such as his soul loved. That too was a part of the welcome. His big body craved it, and meeting its prescience thrilled into lusty life and joy unknown without her. He touched his horse with the spur, and as he sprang forward it broke from Henry’s lips in song:

*“O western wind, when wilt thou blow
That the small rain down can rain?
Christ, that my love were in my arms
And I in my bed again!”*

Riding alone, a lover adventurous, with only George and a few men riding behind him at a distance, he was happy. Lost youth overtook him

under the Hever beeches lifting ancient arms aghast to heaven, and he rode with a will.

Open went the great obedient gate. All castles are the King's when he enters. Hospitable fires roaring up vast chimneys poured out liquid rubies to light his face and eager eyes. Rochford welcomed him—lean and servile—pointing to the door of the little room he remembered leading the way, turning at the closed door. Etiquette commanded that he should open it to the King, but his Master thrust him back and he fled—before the door opened.

Ruddy firelight broke on Henry turning the heaped snow on the mullioned window-ledge to rose. A winter moon hung in the sky cold and remote. No other lights lit the slender silver figure by the fire. He saw her eyes mysterious in the fighting lights and sprang to meet her, amazing tears in his eyes that wetted her cheeks as he wrung her to him. Silence. At last she said faintly:

“I would have stayed away, dear heart. For your dear sake I would have stayed. But I could not. I could not!”

He kissed her in dumb surrender of his manhood to her womanhood.

That night Hever Castle roared with plenty, mirth, and music. The King sat beneath its roof, and it was as though he had brought Christmas again with him to hall and to the buzzing servers' quarters.

*'Tis merry in hall
When beards wag all—*

but as merry where the serving-men and women drank his health in bright brown stinging ale and knocked with great stripped beef bones on the oaken tables to sound his praises. “The King! The King!” The vaulted roof rang like drums to the lusty singing and shouting.

Within,—but not in the great hall—in the smaller banqueting room where departed Ormonds and Boleyns looked coldly down upon the table, Henry sat with his half-frightened hostess—Lady Rochford—beside him, and about the board, Anne, her father, and George. No more. A mere family party, so it might have seemed to any peeper pressed against the heavy window. Good cheer and firelight and noble wines and happy hearts to taste them.

But had that peeper been History with her book and pen what might she not have written had Destiny also looked over her shoulder and whispered into her ear. A girl's will, and the past down-rushing into ruin! Strange unknown shapes forming like figures seen in mist. Freedom springing, a phoenix, from the smoke and stench of flaming pyres of martyrdom. Beauty

burnishing her gold with her handmaidens of song and speech and brush and pen, the beacon-bright future born in blood of birth-pangs and bathed in tears for cleansing.

The future. Word terrible and beautiful to all human ears. And a girl's will to mould it! But gladdest and merriest of all was the King with the fair falcon reclaimed from the skies and perched upon his wrist at last.

Chapter Ten

THE next day the King returned to London half satisfied and fully rejoicing, and Wolsey unfeignedly rejoiced with him. They had got her, and they would tame her swiftly. A few days later her uncle the Duke of Norfolk, a fine fighting man but grey and wizened as much with statecraft as with war, rode down to Hever for high family conclave. Suddenly on him who had more or less slighted the Boleyn connection had burst the importance of the girl. He had known—who had not?—that the King pursued her, but then he had pursued (and caught) Mary and many; such sly romances had no interest for Norfolk. They were entirely irrelevant to real life. But word had reached him from France, from a hundred filtering channels, that this was a thing out of the common, to be watched, tended, plotted, that it might bear all the good it should for the Boleyns and their fortunate friends.

The point to be debated was whether Anne should accept the offer of her old place about Queen Katharine or whether it would be better to demand what might almost be called a second court for her. It could be done, and such positions were well understood in Europe, though they had been by no means so formal and open in England where the *maîtresse en titre* was still an unfamiliar figure.

Her father, George, and the Duke sat to decide it, all eager, all with a certain deference to her, George waiting her will and silent. She sat among them almost indifferent, knowing that whatever they willed she would act after her own fashion.

The older men were half afraid to trust her at Court. Danger! Envy, hatred, malice, possibly slow daily poison, a delicate droplet in a cup of wine. And again—she had earned the distinction of more luxury and apartness than befell the mere maids of honour. She must not lower herself—no! Better ask and have. It lasted an hour.

At the end Anne rose and leaning lightly with one hand on her chair-back spoke and with a pride that topped any of theirs.

“My lords—my honourable father and uncle, I thank you both for your good counsel, but this I say with freedom. When I was driven out you

scorned and rated me. My fall into disfavour was my own doing, so you delighted to say. So be it! Then my rise shall be my own doing, and if again I fall you will be the less to blame. I will be the Queen's maid and serve my apprenticeship like another, and I am not, nor will be, the King's mistress until my heart so choose. And I heartily beseech your forgiveness for this my homely truth."

Her last words are humble, written, but spoken they flashed pride. With her small deer-like head held high and proud lips she took them as small creeping things in her way. It impressed Norfolk wonderfully and at the same time angered him to the bone—he who had intended to guide and share as head of the clan! He also rose and leaning on his staff said aridly:

"Well, young mistress, young blood will have its way. The day may come when you will be glad of an old man's counsel."

"And if so may I look to my good uncle?"

"That I do not say. It depends neither on me nor you."

When he had gone George said coolly:

"You have made an enemy. But what is one among so many? He licks the King's boots and will therefore lick your shoe. Our beloved uncle has the scent of a hound for success."

"Let him smell!" said Anne contemptuously.

When she arrived at Windsor to attend the aging Queen her entry at Court was a different matter indeed from the last. She took with her a wardrobe far exceeding that of Princess Mary. The Queen-Duchess was now dead and her cheerful widower remarried, so there was no rivalry to be dreaded either from above or below. Nor could there have been, for all was of her own and Simonette's devising and struck envy dumb, being of the most absolute fancy. And she went with smiles on her lips and kind words for all and stepped at once into the position she had been painfully achieving before—a sort of uncrowned queenship of all that was gay, young, merry, and beauteous, full of zest and spirit. The Queen received her with resignation and to Anne mattered neither one way nor another. Her quick senses scented relinquishment in Katharine—realization that the King must amuse himself with young blithesome women. The aging wife's inevitable decline in the pitiless duel between husband and wife! She occupied herself more with religion and her pale daughter Mary, gave much thought to the politics of Europe and the risen ascendancy of her august nephew the Emperor Charles, essential in her mind to Henry and England, and took little

heed of Anne—to her a piece of Court furniture, irksome indeed, but as well she as another.

The Revellers—no longer known as the Revellers—for this was not judged suitable to Anne's new dignity, gathered about her but on a different footing. In the old days she had been hustled as were the other “maids” into a small parlour for receiving her guests. At Windsor three large chambers nobly tapestried awaited “Mistress Anne” as all the world called her. That difference in itself was so indicative that she and George hesitated over it but finally agreed.

“If I do what I will, people will think me what I am not,” she said. “I may as well take the good with the evil, and I can better spin my webs in surroundings where they can catch and hang.”

The chambers were magnificent in size and fitting and rapidly became the very focus of Court life. The King came daily, commanding the young men and assembled women there to forget formality and make him one with their youth—a command in which for excellent reasons obedience could only be played at, never truly conceded. Anne played also at her duties about the Queen. She was early given to understand they were a sinecure. There was thus much pretence and eyes glittering with watchfulness to see what lay beneath it. The world guessed, and guessed wrong. She had, at this time, achieved the impossible—and it was equally impossible that anyone should have dreamt how it came about.

There was an hour at which it was understood that no one visited Mistress Anne. She had her occupations like another. True, but her preoccupation was Henry. A way had been contrived by the alteration of certain disused rooms by which he could come unseen by the Court to hers, and he used it daily. Not nightly. There the fortress still flew its triumphant virgin flag. And the reason was this:

Shortly after her arrival he came one day alone, almost startling her with the suddenness. She sat by the open window looking out into the far vistas of trees in the Park, sunshine radiant, the world holding its June rejoicing. She rose to meet him with the quiet of perfect motion and with his arm about her led him to the great chair he affected and kneeling before him with her arms on his knees looked up in his face. It was a scene of perfect familiarity and tried tenderness,—enchanting to Henry. Her “much” was more than any other woman's “most,” and she captured his intellect as completely as his heart and instincts. In this attitude she had poured precious knowledge of the inner working of the French Court into his ears. He knew from her the weaknesses and hopes of all the men and women there—and

more, for all Europe gravitated to France as it never could to England, and the knowledge was inestimable to him and to Wolsey. Inner determining matters that neither their spies nor ambassadors could detect. This alone made her a power,—none had occupied her peculiar position in France and nothing had escaped her. With this and every art of the perfectly skilled woman of the world and born entertainer she could keep him off the merely physical track as no other woman could have done.

But there was more. Her finer instinct had told her the game would not be too dangerous to play. The man's virility was failing. No human being dared hint it. To himself he would not own it but inwardly, secretly, he was grateful to have the question, as it were, evaded, by amusement, politics, what not,—and the Paradise of the society of the only woman who could amuse him. Anne could play off her modesties safely while the King was doubtful of more than herself. Not that his words evaded the corporeal side of their bond—indeed, his mind perhaps dwelt the more on it, and certainly the grossness of his speech was scarlet. But that vent open he would allow himself to be drawn off the scent at the moment when to another woman than Anne it would have seemed that the inevitable was upon them. And these delicate divagations humoured him. He had testified his masculinity and that would serve for a turn. Not always, but at this time his doctor Butts held out hope of better health and with it certainties that he dreaded to risk now. As she knelt before him looking up with all her loveliness of brows and eyes and smiling lips he said earnestly:

“Mine own sweetheart, I have a matter to break to you very urgent and deep, so deep that I have let time and times go by and have not spoken. But now that I know my darling tried and true I will speak on your soul's oath to say naught to any man or woman without leave given of my own lips. Is that word pledged? Not to George Boleyn your other self nor to another.”

“If I did not know myself secret and trustworthy I would take no oath,” she said trembling inwardly. “But if I betray a word to George or another may I—may I lose *you*! Can I say more? You are my heaven.”

He bent and kissed her on the lips, and then holding her hand in his spoke in French as a man glad to rid his soul of a burden heavy to bear alone.

“Sweetheart, it is known to you and to many that I have been grieved in conscience by the judgment of God upon my marriage. The Queen is the Queen and a woman so wise and courteous as no man could desire a better wife but from the first God's face was set against it flintwise. Look at my children! Sent but to perish that I might the better mark my doom. ‘You shall

touch but shall not attain.' And He who punished alone knows my penitence."

She listened in deep silence, though this was no news. How often of late had it been hurled against the unhappy Queen? How often torn to tatters in Court speech? He was not a man to digest his grievances alone and liked a commiserating circle. But all had taken it as a visitation like death, to be endured with resignation—the Queen most of all. Now—what was seeding in his slowly working brain to be driven gustily by his unloosed temper?

"So, sweet my heart, I have taken counsel with Wolsey and Archbishop Warham [her heart trembled like a leaf in storm] and I have told them I can no longer live in incest with the wife of my brother, for it is forbidden in Scripture, and if frail man set himself against God he is broken in his tenderest part. As I."

She dropped her head in her hands almost stunned. While she had been surveying the ground, wondering, waiting, losing precious moments, he of the brain far slower than hers had acted. He could feel her quivering against his knees and misread every feeling that shook her. Under her little chin he put his great hand and lifted her face to his, sweet with closed eyes and lashes like black crescents on the cheek, red lips speechless with the knowledge of his unspeakable love. So he read it and adored her.

She was not for a moment deceived. Love for her—yes, mountainous desire, yearning insatiable as ocean,—but also the sated dullness and weariness of married companionship with nothing new to say or do together. The tedium of a wife who loves calmly, securely, but can pretend to no worship of a divinity nor offer perpetual incense on her knees. But that is a man's need and but for it the harem had never been. Anne knew this well. Was it not the reason for her own existence? Also no man or woman could be about the King without the knowledge of how his soul yearned for a boy. Not only for selfish pride but because England needed it. The remembrance of the Wars of the Roses was too fresh as yet not to press home the need of a direct heir. Men's blood and lives were centred on that question. Henry's own declining years might meet ruin if he could not hold out a Prince of Wales to the people. Who cared for women? What were they on the throne? It was true that Anne herself with others was unconsciously building a far different world where women would set their feet on men's necks and rule. But that was in the future.

Still, behind all these warring motives in the man's mind she saw one constant one, herself, and in and for a moment knew the pang of amazed

gratitude for fidelity. So she looked up at him with eyes dimmed and praying hands, and clasping them in his he answered her unasked question.

“Wolsey and Warham were—shall I say—favourable but as men who doubt. They see the heavy task after twenty years of marriage—so-called. But Warham the Archbishop had ranged himself against it at the time when my father the King debated it with her parents the King of Aragon and Queen of Castile. I would they and I had heard his wisdom! But no. The King and Queen her parents procured a dispensation from the Pope for our marriage asserting that she was still virgin but wilily stretching the dispensation to sanction the marriage even if she were not. And so it was done, with great reasons of policy and dowry and so forth. And when my father died I shouldered the burden and was bound for life.”

He stopped with a catch in his throat. It shook him. It shook her. Fiercely natural, both of them. She said passionately:

“But if so, what then? Wolsey and Warham can never loose it. The Pope cannot go against a Pope’s dispensation. O hopeless—most hopeless!”

Indeed she scarcely knew what she said aloud—so stirred was she to see her inmost thought made word. Not that she had known the way. The Queen’s death was her only hope, and vague, future chances. But now—now! She was the tigress, smelling her prey walking far off in the jungle but all unknowing approaching the deadly tryst.

“How—how?” she asked and could have struck her master in the effort to hasten his slow speech. He sat considering his words:

“Difficult to show without papers, but there is much. My father, astute and wary, desired the betrothal because he could not and would not repay the dowry half paid with her to my brother. But also he would give me a chance for receding later on if policy and my will demanded it. Therefore my wise father demanded that the day after my betrothal to Katharine, the very day after my fifteenth birthday, I should make a most secret but solemn protest from myself against any marriage with her. It was drawn by Bishop Fox and I signed it most secretly in a room none visited at our palace of Shene, and it abides to be a part of my salvation now.”

Neither Anne’s heart nor lips made any blame on this card-sharpping to pouch the Spanish dowry. Her quick thoughts had fled ahead of it, though she noted it to be the essential element. She said most tenderly and with the utmost caution, now kneeling between his knees that she might reach his troubled face the better:

“Heart of my heart, may I speak the doubts and fears that rise as I hear?”

He kissed her.

“So best. It is what others will see and sharpens my wits.”

“Then, darling, if of free choice you married her when you were King does not that wipe out your poor protest?—poor, poor boy to be so bound and so young!”

He gloomed.

“That is the sore the flies will settle on,—that, and her protest of virginity. But for the first—I was in the same case as my father. And for the second—I liked the woman well enough. I had known her and many a friendly jest between us since I was ten. And for the rest I was a lusty fellow of eighteen and she twenty-four and with her long dark red hair and fair skin a well-enough—more than well-enough—toy to please me. Nature spoke and I wedded her.”

Anne dropped her head into her hands again. Even for that brief springtide of passion she sickened at the man. He of her dreams would have foreseen herself, would have held his heart in his hand like a Grail until he could lay it at her feet. So sure was she of her own over-riding charm that she could not choose to conceive a world that either knew her not or had forgotten. Light loves a man must have—but marriage! He partly read her thoughts and drew her hands away, forcing her to look up.

“My own sweetheart, kings must marry, and if a boy of eighteen dreamed a June dream that he loved a woman when all the world was wooing and loving, should it hurt you? I knew nothing of love, and God knows there is no god so easy to misread; he walks in so many guises. Now I am your pupil and a patient one, for you are Love’s own Lady. But how could I know? If I had, I had not damned myself. But you were a child with your doll under Hever beeches, and none foresaw your sweetness.”

It was astounding the tenderness and subjection of the great blond brute in this imperious man to the woman who ruled him! Even she herself marvelled while it fed her towering pride. She said tenderly:

“Dear my heart, though a maid cannot know I know. And your chivalry for the poor lady alone and a widow in a strange land! Who but I knows her gentle conditions.”

He looked at her gratefully. If there is good in a man, and Henry was not devoid of it, the concubine in prospect or actuality must not abuse the wife. That is his last rag of self-esteem, and she knew it. A very small page would contain what this Anne did not know of the way of a man with a maid and the maid’s expected response.

“But the Cardinal—the Archbishop?” she asked, gently leading him back to the matter in hand.

He sighed and roused himself.

“Yes. They consider now whether and how to apply to Rome—not for a divorce but nullity, on the ground that it was never a marriage, she having been my brother’s true widow and therefore my sister in the flesh, a nearness which neither our Holy Father nor God Himself could dispense, it being against His own law and very loathsome in the sight of man. And I think—I hope——”

His utterance choked, and florid red flushed every vein of his face and neck to bursting. In this his own being was bound up, for he saw in the woman at his feet not only his life’s love but the casket in which the jewel of the heir must be borne—the inestimable vessel of the hope to be. For this he was content to hoard his overtaxed failing virility. For this he was content to hold off as long as he dared, knowing these great matters would take much time, that the legitimacy of the heir-to-be must never be impugned. And this all ignorantly aided Anne’s own resolute will to hold off also until it threatened her empire, lest in granting she should lose and sink into the mere King’s harlot in the eyes of all.

But what news! These great men would even consider it! They thought there was possibility, if no more! And Kings can move the fatherly hearts of Popes whose sons they are. For the first time her own conduct became coherent. She had followed it by instinct as birds fly home through trackless ways, and behold the reason was before her now. Glowing triumph sprang like a fountain’s uprush higher heart, but not to her face. That was calm and sad.

“May it prosper! May it prosper for the good of your Grace and of all England!” she said. “And then a great marriage and your poor sweetheart and friend forgot!”

For answer he clasped her to his heart as she knelt and kissed her with violence.

“For me—one, one only and you are she. Yes, a great marriage. A marriage that gives a king his heart’s love and his boy and peace and merriment at bed and board. I am a man and I will have a man’s joys. But withhold yourself now, sweetheart. Withhold me if you can. In the beginning I did not guess what great things would be, and I hunted you like other men and near cursed you because you would not yield. But you were right. You did not know why, but your maidenhood guided you as they say it guides pure women always. Let us so continue—if we can! If we can!”

They sat silent a few minutes in the close intimacy of their hope, and joy distilled slowly at first and then like a fast flowing stream into her heart. Here was the man fighting on her side—his very passion furthering her ends, his purpose forging the fast bonds of friendship and interest between them strong as steel. She adored the goodness of fate and might almost have taken it for God in its benignant wisdom. Presently:

“And the Queen, my heart? How will she take it?”

“Hardly. How otherwise? There is the Princess Mary, and until you give me my boy she is heiress, nor dare we dispossess her and risk civil war. But it is the thought of my good Cardinal and the Archbishop that being so godly she may gladly end her days in a nunnery, honoured and richly provided. And if this be so it is a smooth case to present alike to the Holy Father and her nephew the Emperor. But now, my dear delight, your help! You have a grudge against Wolsey. Do not deny, for I know it. But Wolsey is my friend and the sword in my hand. The man is dominant in Europe. Have him I must. He must neither know, dream, nor guess the true bond stronger than flesh, though the flesh is there and waiting, between us two. Keep that secret as you dread hell and desire heaven. But that he may be readier for you when the hour comes, shed your sweetness that way also, good sweetheart, and so you shall please me and further our end. I swear that without him it is impossible. The Queen’s relations abroad hold jubilating letters I wrote concerning my joy in wedding her. Difficulties are thick as grass in summer. Then do your part!”

She promised. What would she not have promised?—and that promise would be kept. She realized in a flash how Wolsey would consider her—the woman of easy virtue who must be conciliated that she might keep the King amused until the royal marriage was broken. And then—Hey for a great alliance with France or a German princess, and the concubine flung out to fester on a carrion heap if Wolsey had his way! Promise? If she had needed any further incentive to play her part and hide the secret it was the thought of Wolsey’s face when the matter was ended and the truth faced him. They sat planning her change to the Cardinal—rejoicing, hoping, plotting for an hour more, and then Henry went off leaning heavily on his big jewelled staff, and she sent for George Boleyn. He came—a fine bird in Court plumage now—himself not perfectly understanding the relation between Anne and the King but daily more confident in her power.

She told him briefly and pointedly as he lounged in the King’s great chair that it was Henry’s desire that she should conciliate the Cardinal, for

he found it difficult to work with him while Wolsey believed that what he called “a night crow” was whispering against him in the King’s ear.

“And do it I must,” she concluded. “And the easier because the King sends him shortly on an embassy to France for reasons many and great, and that is as I would have it and best for us all.”

George considered.

“But you loathed the man. You do not change, Anne. What is it?”

“What I say. The King’s will. But you are right. I do not change. Hate him I will until I am dust—or he. But, George, go to him. Tell him that I feel still the weight of his displeasure and would have it known I acknowledge he was right and I wrong. That the King’s Majesty and his own benignancy have convinced me of my fault, and that I am at his feet for his benediction. Let it be today. Slide in that none can hold the King’s favour for long who displease him and my contrite heart knows it. There is none can do it like you, for you have the French grace and the Italian subtlety to trap an enemy to his fall. And then return and call Smeaton and the rest. We must plot a masque.”

They looked at each other, and George went his way to seek the Cardinal. He played his part consummately. The picture left on the great Cardinal’s mind was that of a young woman unsure of her position with a voluptuary like the King and very willing to have his good graces to back her now that she was irrecoverably committed. All this was good hearing to Wolsey and he swallowed the bait as a fish gulps the hook. Never could it have occurred to him that she had commission from the King—the boy whose heart had once lain in his hand!—to deceive him.

Said George:

“Indeed she fears your Grace has forgotten her where once long since you were favourable to her humility. She said all but with tears, ‘I have known the day when his Grace would now and again send me a little choice dish from his own table knowing I have a dainty tooth. But now all is forgotten, though God is my witness that I danced to please him as well as the King’s Majesty, and had his good liking for it.’ And if a word from your Grace can soothe a wounded heart, for she is but a woman, all said——”

A word? Wolsey sent many. He was all friendship. He admired—nay, he affectioned the fair young lady who had done so much to promote his master’s content. And he sent also what she was very willing to receive, a most agreeable basket of delicious fish, the lately introduced carp and so on, the interstices filled in with shrimps of the best. No one was such a caterer

for epicures as Wolsey, and henceforth, peace being symbolized in shrimps, his messengers very often waited upon her with the like dainties—indeed, nearly as regularly as the arrival of a choicest dish from the King's dinner daily at her own. Between King and Cardinal her table was well served. And if, as the Court chroniclers tell, she hankered for more, she had it, for even when Wolsey left for France his men had orders to continue his gifts to the favourite. George and Anne did their work well.

Yet though this had soothed a part of his cares it was with a very anxious mind he left England. The King was imperiously urging the secret matter, and it was almost beyond Wolsey's wits to see how all the fighting interests could be adjusted. It would not be difficult at the French Court, for they would eagerly court the English alliance, and the Princess Renée, sister to the dead Queen of France, was a pawn they would push forward on the European chess-board. That would be Wolsey's own wish. But how to conciliate Queen Katharine's mighty nephew—the Emperor Charles? How to win the Pope? That was to front the impossible unless the Queen herself could be won, and of that he despaired. If Henry added his torrents of passion to the mixture Wolsey honestly felt he might sink under the care. There, Anne was his great hope. She had the art of keeping Henry content, comparatively tranquil in a summer of geniality which radiated to his overburdened self. To her accordingly he paid his best court, dwelling on the service she rendered to him and to all by her dutiful conduct to the King. He thought of her at this time as a modern and cleverer edition of the little Jewess who was engaged by his advisers to lie in the bosom of King David and keep up the vital heat. In Henry's case heat was certainly not the object. There was too much of that without bosom-aid, but she certainly was the fragrant oil which made the wheels revolve smoothly for them all. And naturally, where the King and Cardinal were agreed and the Queen was apathetic, no finger wagged against her.

She was more than content. Her heart's desire was upon her and a mighty dawn but just below the horizon. She glowed. She gave out flashes like a diamond, splintered rays of vivid colours, gathering up in herself all the Tudor splendour and mastery.

As for Wolsey, he was growing old, as men called age in those times, under many cares. For him it was late afternoon and his utmost most vaulting ambition could only promise a splendid sunset showered with parting gratitudes and honours. But he would leave his memorial in his Master's heart and England mighty in European politics. Anne, he saw as a little cog in the great slowly revolving wheel.

Chapter Eleven

IN her intercourse with Henry all was the sweetest spontaneity on the surface. Others saw it as well as he and marvelled at the unconsidered sophistication with which she met every difficulty of the case and turned it into a furtherance. Was he irritable and suffering too severely from his leg for riding, she made archery a delight that put hunting in the shade. Then, in Lincoln green and a feathered hat, with shooting glove—all complete as a man might go yet exquisitely feminine and adventurous—her arrow quivered often in the bull's-eye and she applauded herself as gaily and simply as did all the Court. She could do nothing unskilfully, or perhaps rather undertook nothing in which she was not sure of herself, which serves as well. And at archery she knew she looked her best, even as the Greeks knew of old that the human body responds to the bow and arrows as its divinest weapon, though at bowls her long fine fingers and keen eye aimed true. She rode with infinite grace and dauntlessly upon a side-saddle she had herself contrived, partly anticipating the modern one, and the horse knew her firm hand on his mouth as surely as the King knew it on his, responding as obediently. At dancing it was admitted that she was not graceful but grace itself, and not a week passed but some new step or set dance enchanted the King. Her invention was genius of its sort. But most, she had sharpened her skill in cards and games for indoor use at the French Court, where they abounded, and sometimes Henry believed those days were best when the sheeting English rain drove at the windows and winds howled, while within her rooms great fires flamed and over the tables heads bent and merry disputes arose and money changed hands and men's and women's eyes grew hard and eager at the piling heaps of gold and silver. Not only did she know him a born gamester, but she herself was one. Was she not staking every hope on a man whom the past had proved more capricious than any woman?—and she loved the game as well as the stake.

Not only all these accomplishments, but she whose energy of life and rushing vitality had forbidden her ever to sit down to a book became a reader now, for it pleased Henry to talk sometimes of old histories and romances, and she resolved to make herself an approved story-teller. At

night, while Simonette slept on the low pallet beside her stately bed, her candle lit the midnight dark, she poring over the tales, English and Breton,—of the San Grail and Arthur and his knights and the famous romances of Melusine and Sir Amadis de Gaul and what not. The lark-songs and romances of the Troubadours were hers, and chapters might be written on the fine flatteries she contrived to draw for Henry from the chivalric kings who rescued fair damsels and planted the flag of knighthood as the defence of religion. It was honey to him, and in truth it was more than love's blindness that made him clap his thick hands and roar applause when the chosen band gathered about them and he in his chair sat to hear the storyteller in firelight with frost and snow and a bitter remote moon outside, only her great eyes and waving white hands plainly visible. The actress—for she was that and more—held them all spellbound with sweetly inflected voice and quick gesture,—her whole soul in the story she told, be it sad or gay. Her whole soul—let us say—all but the part of it engaged in thrilling to her own power upon the men and women who heard. The Queen sat in her dull deserted chambers stitching at endless broideries, sighing—sighing, half dead with care and desolation, but in Anne's chambers the river of life ran swiftly, sparkling, foaming, and all who drank lived every moment of it. Even George watched her amazed, and her swift daring while Victory perched on her gay banners.

But, as she said to him in private, care was always needed.

“What is there that cannot pall on the lustful man? Give him the whole world and he will ask the moon. And the moon is too high for snatching. Therefore I will not give him the whole world. Sometimes I will go away and he shall feel the miss of me, I am still unwon—I am my own, not his, and he shall know it.”

“But dare you?” George asked. “It is true. All men feel this if they do not know it. But a king?”

“And why are kings weary and sated but because they are given all and it clogs appetite? I will not cloy his. I am free and winged and I will fly to Hever or Blickling, or where I will when I will.”

Accordingly every now and then she fled, and Henry withered without her. She must go, she said. It was for his sake too. Might they not slip into folly both would repent if this dear nearness forced them always upon one another? Sometimes too, she said, she drooped for her native air. A little weariness—no more. Well, she would stay if he desired it! And then he would urge her almost violently to go, would hear of no delay, and yet repent himself the moment the falcon's wings were spread. Indeed, his love

was less carnal than a need insatiable and crying for all that makes man man in this temporal world, and in all she fed him.

The letters he wrote in those absences!

MINE OWN SWEETHEART,

This shall be to tell you of the great loneliness I find since your going for I assure you I think the time longer since your last departing than I used to do a whole fortnight. I think your kindness and my fervence of love cause it for otherwise I would not have thought it possible that for so little a time it should have grieved me. But now that I am coming to you my pains are half relieved and so I am much comforted because my book substantially helps my business. And for that reason I have spent above four hours this day upon it which has caused me to write a shorter letter to you this time because of some pain in my head.

His book? Yes, the King had turned author in earnest and laboured like a man who works for his living. For he worked for more than his living—his heart's delight, and he like other men could not live by bread alone. He had suddenly bethought him of many arguments which no one could advance as could he himself, and these laid at the Pope's feet would surely settle the matter of the marriage. Who could resist them? He called in the help of Warham and other learned divines such as could be trusted both for Latin and secrecy and toiled abundantly. It would have delighted Anne in any case and she saw its immense importance to her hopes, but also she saw in it a new way of engaging his interest. At once she plunged into theology—not to the exclusion of the world, the flesh, and the devil, be sure!—but because anything that holds a lover—even religion—is a woman's weapon. To her amazement she found it interested her, and the interest showed in her pertinent questions and replies. Here Henry was instructor, and the new attitude enchanted him. Great tomes were spread before them, and Anne, naturally impatient of authority and with little concern for any but the things of this world, saw plenty in them to rouse her quick wits to questioning the great pretensions of Rome. Neither she nor Henry could foresee what was to come, but insensibly in both minds the final authority of Rome was weakened, though of that not a word was uttered. There might be two sides to that question as to all others. The great difference between the Middle Ages and modernity is that the Middle Ages were one-dimensional in their attitude to all experience and modernity is myriad-dimensional. In the first case a door was shut and no curiosity forced it open. Now dimly—very

dimly at first—the eternal Why suggested itself to Anne and through her was communicated to Henry's slower intelligence.

But there was one thing he did not as yet tell Anne. Though the victory of the nullity of his marriage with his brother's wife might be assured there still remained his connection with the unfortunate Mary. Of that the Pope and his cardinals might take an unexpectedly serious view, and that was a past which even death could not annul.

The matter of the annulment and the King's treatise were, however, laid before the Vatican. The great first blow in the battle was struck.

Anne, wearied with concentration and excitement, betook herself to Hever to gather her forces for the struggle and for another reason. No one knew better than she how Henry would take it. Men of large and florid aspect are never credited with what modernity calls "nerves," but she knew better. Half Henry's temper was nervous panic: panic of others, of the nature of things and of himself. He shouted his orders as he thought became a king, but if they were not obeyed his astonishment took on the hue of fear lest ways and means should fail him. And it was very soon discernible that the Vatican would not be readily obedient and that its resources and evasions would be a series of surprises sprung at the most inopportune moment.

The time had come when the Queen must be sounded and first of all by him. For that reason also he agreed, heavy-hearted, to his darling's absence for a time and she went—a heavy volume or two of theology in her train. But before going she clung to him "as to her last earthly refuge," so she said, and on his finger she pressed the ruby ring of her mother as her "dearest possession" next to his picture.

So at Greenwich Henry betook himself to his very difficult mission with the Queen and Anne to the peace of Hever—and to many meetings with Thomas Wyatt. Without the flattery of lovers it was impossible she should exist. He was at Allington, his wife in London, and the sweet-natured Mary Wyatt who adored her brother was no hindrance to his riding where he would through the deep leafy lanes of Kent—lanes older even than the ancient brooding churches. He loved them. Men plodded them, glad or weary, before the Romans came to England and ran their haughty highways North, South, East, and West, and he had seen them each day bloom greener and lovelier, true pathways to love's haven since boyhood.

He found that at Hever. At Court she saw him only among others—a speck in a rainbow jumble of colours. Here he had her to himself. The lord of the castle and his wife in London, George—Heaven knows where! for he came and went with a swallow's dart,—and Anne the chatelaine. In a few

days Henry would blot his light. That was to be guessed, but meanwhile Wyatt had leave to come as he would, and so sweetly she received him, with such a return to early youth and days in green woodlands together, that he could believe the present fitted that beloved past without a break and the loud world between was a dream.

How could he tell that weary of worshipping and humouring she needed the medicine of being worshipped, followed, and humoured herself? She went very far to prove to him that worship at least was welcome, yet, as before, only to the straight-drawn limit. It was torture and delight so mixed that he could not tell one from the other, he could only know that every permitted day his horse's head turned inevitably to Hever, and every day she welcomed him as though the long delicious days craved his presence to complete them. A dream;—and a dream waked him to his danger.

A dance of summer lightning was playing on the dark as he lay abed, opening the heavens like a flower of light and closing again into immitigable darkness, and watching its play he fell asleep.

He saw great towers against a livid sky and through the gateways men marching in tramping process, steady, automatic like the thudding of a great machine. It seemed that their march had begun with the world's beginning and might continue to doom, so endless the files, so louring and ruthless the Tower. But this was not the Tower he knew. Some unimaginable fortress not built by man. At a window above stood Anne, pale and stern—watching, the blood dropping from her locked fingers, and in the strange fluid transition of dream he who had been watching also knew that in the midst of the endless army she herself marched, hands bound and helpless to a fate she saw but could not stay. And though the march continued and the feet tramped they could never pass the window where she stood looking, looking down upon herself. The picture moved yet was motionless and horrible—a nightmare. He woke to a burst of distant thunder and the heavens opening to their deeps with white light that turned the earth livid, and so sat up in his naked bed covered with cold sweat.

Even when dawn came, hands full of roses, he took it as a warning. But of what? Some near and prescient urgency took him to Hever that he might tell her and hear her laugh it away—or shudder with him, and he went. As dreams will, it became unreal and shadowy as he rode through ferny shade and saw larks rise to storm the heavens with song, leaving to earth the fluting of the blackbird at his ear. Perilous the world might be but how lovely! And she was lovely!—she who had opened enchantment to him—the fairy girl who danced alone in the woods, her limbs washed with moonlight,

alike dream-daughter and mother of dreams, the very acolyte of beauty. What harm or danger could come to her? A thrill of cold ran over him but he smiled and rode on.

Presently he haltered his horse to an old beech tree in the pleasance and walked quickly up to the herb-garden. It was their tryst that day. Great yew hedges surrounded it, and like a cup it brimmed with drowsy afternoon sunshine drawing fragrance pure and clean from the crowded leaves and little blossoms preferred by the bees above all garden queens. A heavenly place and time.

She sat by the ancient dial under its motto—

I measure with shadow the sunny hours—

looking thoughtfully into emptiness, a large volume on the grass beside her and an open letter. Even there amid that rustic tranquillity she could not seem a rustic maid as Mary had done. Something brilliant, diamond-like, and infinitely sophisticated was in the grace of her dress and small fine features. A great young lady playing at rusticity she sat in the herb-garden because she believed that the perfume of the leaves extracted and warmed by sunshine was a sovereign elixir for the skin. Yet he was touched. He could but remember how as a very young girl she would come to gather May dew in a silver cup, tilting the leaves of rosemary and balsam and mint that the pearls might roll from them into the silver. Aching memory possessed him as he saw her so. He stood and watched.

Presently she drew up the golden tablet that hung by her side and began to write upon a paper—he guessed in answer to the letter. At once he went forward.

“I want you, Anne—I want you! Last night I had a dream and you were in it.”

“I thought I had been in many of your dreams,” she said smiling, and motioned with her hand for him to sit. But he stood leaning against the dial.

“No lover’s dream. Listen, and read it for me as Joseph did Pharaoh’s.”

He told it while she wove grass blades together still smiling as she heard.

“A great coil about nothing. Lightning and a black cloud and the distant mutter of thunder. And yesterday I know you cut your hand. May you never dream worse of me. But, True Thomas, this is the last of our friendly days at Hever. The King comes with my father tomorrow.”

“Friendly! Love, love, and you know it. I have kissed you, and you suffered it. You have lain in my arms and you suffered it. I could swear your

lips answered. Anne, do you love me—or what is it? Do you stand at the window and doom yourself and me as the black hours march me on yet never escape you? Do you——”

“Escape me!” she laughed aloud. “True Thomas, you ask too much of life and love. You desire to build eternal towers as in your dream—towers to endure in verse when we are dust. To me love is a green summer arbour woven of roses and plaited stems. We rest and kiss and rejoice, knowing that in a few months icy winter will shriek through bare stems and all the roses dead. No more to me than that. Be wise. The King comes tomorrow. You have had your day.”

The sudden cruelty and cold drove him half mad. Passion arrested curls back like a wave upon the deep ocean of hatred, and could he have killed her with a gesture he would have done it.

“Then, if it is so, come let us kiss and part,” he said and flinging himself beside her took her in the arms of a madman and kissed her breathlessly and furious, releasing her so suddenly that she stumbled and all but fell. Only the dial saved her. She clutched it and stood.

“Take this and this and tell it to the King if you dare,” he said thickly. “In my heart I know you for what you are though again and yet again you deceive me. Heartless, false, you worship the black Trinity of the World, the Flesh, and the Devil. What else? I go, but I take your kisses with me and this—for a remembrance of a false wanton.”

He tore at the thin golden chain that hung the tablet to her side and crammed both into his breast and so went striding off.

Strange! She was not angry. It was a tribute. She even smiled a little, looking down at the daisies and wondering at what point he would turn. But he did not turn. Then it would be tomorrow—no, not tomorrow, for the King was coming. Thomas would write one of his bitter-sweet letters and all would go on as before. She had played the same game so often that it might be eternal. Even in heaven he pursuing and she eluding. She did not know how far revulsion may carry a man nor what part the gold tablet would play in her strange story. The whole thing had lasted little more than ten minutes yet was to endure as a landmark where the road ends and a sign says, “No further.”

In thrusting the chain and tablet into his breast a something had fallen from it—a paper. She picked it up and read—curiously at first, then with a certain triumphant pity. He had meant to give it to her and had only left it, but still it was hers, a blossom in her coronal of praise.

*Forget not yet the proved intent
Of such a truth as I have meant.
My great travail so gladly spent,
Forget not yet!*

*Forget not yet the great assays,
The cruel wrong, the scornful ways,
The painful patience in delays,
Forget not yet.*

*Forget not—O forget not this!—
How long ago hath been and is
The mind that never meant amiss.
Forget not yet!*

*Forget not then thine own approved,
The which so long hath thee so loved.
Whose steadfast faith yet never moved.
Forget not this!*

Reading the last line but one she laughed a little to herself—“And he a married man! Yet it is true. The heart knows nothing of marriage, and it is vital only as lands and crowns hang on it. Could I have loved him—No. A summer day together and all said. But he will come again to Court, and I must have my tablet. If he hears it is the King’s gift——”

She started. A step she knew was coming through the hedges. Praise God it had come no sooner! She stood a minute listening—the mask off her face—and anger, weariness, revolt, very legible. Next she smoothed them away and stood in a lovely pose against the dial looking down on the creeping shadow as though its lesson moved her.

I measure with shadow the sunny hours—

and so Henry found her, alone, gladdening to see him a day sooner than he had thought it possible he should come to Hever. They went in slowly hand in hand, and left the perfumes and the bees to their summer round.

Great news but anxious. And first he had broken “the secret matter” to “my wife.”

“A difficult business, my own sweetheart. She and I have lain breast to breast and had five children between us, and were it not for God and my conscience I could not have so spit in the face of the past and——”

“The poor lady!” murmured Anne, all ears and eyes.

“I love you the better for your pity. Indeed it was a hard case! But I told her she knew that for long I had suffered in my conscience seeing that no

luck rested on the marriage nor any blessing.”

“And she?”

“At first she listened as she has listened often. Face like a yellow mask and stern lips afraid to let through a word to give a hold or widen the breach. Poor lady!”

“Poor lady!” Anne echoed mechanically.

“And then, sitting before her, I told the truth, and it came out with not so much difficulty as I feared, for indeed I had thought the words would choke in my throat. But I told her, as reason is, that I had appealed the matter to Rome, and come in her company I must not and would not until it was settled and my conscience discharged one way or another. And this, I said, was so fixed in me as nothing could move it. And having said this—for all takes more time than to tell,—I would have left her but that she took me by the hand and knelt and—— But of this it is not needful to speak. Suffice it that I came away leaving natural grief behind me.”

Anne would have given much to hear what had been said but dared not press it. He acknowledged no scruple that should hinder his conscience from satisfying itself yet had evidently a scruple in exposing its consequences. Also it was noticeable that he had called her “my wife” and Anne knew that “his wife” her own reason called Katharine. Twenty years and more of honour as Queen and wife are substantial things. Even a word from the Vatican cannot erase them from the minds and hearts of those most concerned to see them vanish.

Henry went on as if thinking aloud.

“She took it as I supposed would be. Not a waver in her steadfast determination so far as her wifhood goes. Twice she reasserted it but with calm. For the rest—she was a very woman. But no more of that. Wolsey must be recalled from France to see her, and the Pope’s envoy must help to bend her also. Our matter marches, sweetheart, but it will march slowly. Our treatise was laid before His Holiness—the Pope Clement, who is none too holy all said and done!—by our agent Knight, and while he dared not accede at once, for the Emperor Charles is sword and shield to him, he read it and marvelled at the truths set forth and the clearness of their setting. And so, after long parley and interviews and demurring, he would not give what I desired—power to Wolsey and Warham to remit the old dispensation which allowed our marriage—and a cheating lying dispensation it was!—but instead he gave leave to appeal the whole matter to Rome. And this was why I must tell my wife. And now the matter may be public but every step in it secret as death, and to that I adjure you as you value me and our hope.”

She promised for the moment as one in a dream. Could it be possible? Mary pushed silently into an obscure corner; her own virtue a matter for popes and emperors and great queens to stumble at. Had she yielded she had been nothing. Unyielding, the whole world as she knew it from its highest luminary the Pope down through emperors and kings to the merest twitterer of the Court, stood breathless to watch what would happen. Amazing! It was as though she had said like Joshua:

Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the
valley of Ajalon!

and all life had ceased rolling on its orbits.

Seeing her pale he put his arm tenderly about her with all his pride in arms.

“Fear not, sweetheart. With me beside you there is nought to dread. I have failed in nothing. My pure conscience will uphold me. I shall not fail. But it will be slow——”

“It should not be slow if you will it. And sure—had I been your wife—O word amazing and dear!—I had bowed to your will without Pope or Cardinal for love’s sake.”

He kissed her with new tenderness. They were fellow-sufferers, comrades in a great and bitter struggle. Every difficulty would bind them more closely, and he reiterated his conscience and she the love which had she been his wife would have made all sacrifice delight.

So they lied to one another, and Henry, partly at least, to himself. His conscience had been so often cited that he had come to believe in its existence as an almost visible amulet worn about his neck. Would that it had such visible substance that he could lay it before Pope Clement and all the world, even as he had done his treatise, so that they might touch and see and realize the horror of his position.

“To force a man’s conscience—even God cannot!” he repeated, unforeseeing how many consciences he was to force and violate with axe and flame to testify to the truth of his axiom.

There is no exercise more easy—a mere child’s play—than to imagine others in our own skin and absolutely convinced of the truth and honour of our resolves and prejudices even if we have not wholly deceived ourselves. There is none more difficult than to see ourselves from outside. It has indeed a God-like impossibility like that of seeing our own backs—ours and yet invisible except by artificial reflections which may or may not be true.

Had anyone (prepared to go headless within the week) pointed out to Henry that his soul-awakening coincided unluckily with the advent of a charming young woman who had won his heart and mastered him as Una tamed her lion, and also with the fading of a wife who had produced nothing but a silent shrinking daughter, he would have taken ground so lofty that only angels could perch upon its peak, and protested his purity of purpose, the good of England, and much more for the benefit of the dolt and dunderhead who could not recognize nobility when it walked abroad. Besides, he was buttressed by great men. The Pope had declared his doubt natural; Wolsey, though terrified at all the spilt milk that would certainly have to be wiped up, had agreed that he was right in principle. On the day long ago when it was projected Archbishop Warham had protested against the marriage. It had been argued for and against when he was a boy of fifteen, and only the brilliant Spanish sovereigns, Katharine's parents, had been able to push the Pope into granting a dispensation. And how could he know that God would take part against it until dead child after dead child had appeared as a messenger from the Almighty tribunal? He might wish, though he dared not say it, that Princess Mary had not survived to confuse a little the Almighty purpose. But then, she was a mere girl. Never was God so politicized, and promised to be more so! He was indeed the First Counsel for the attack.

All this he repeated to Anne, his one perfect whole-hearted sympathizer, and all the time her clear Boleyn reason persisted in presenting the other side—not for sympathy but as a searchlight shows most dangerous reefs ahead. She did not undervalue them, and was thankful that the King's habit of kingship prevented his realization. She knew as everyone did the hold the Queen had on the people's imagination—the great Spanish princess who had brought floods of gold into England, whose coming had thrown open so many avenues of trade in the Low Countries and wherever her mighty kindred had a word to say. The King's faithful wife, the mother with whom mothers had wept over her cruel disappointments, the unrivalled stateliness and steadfast purpose, the tender heart that had pleaded and won the lives of the misguided London prentices when Henry would have hung them—each boy before his father's door—and lastly the mother of the true heiress, Princess Mary. Many streams met in her. Anne, the enemy, could as surely compute the list of Katharine's strengths as her best friend. She sat silently revolving them as the light waned and in the dining-hall the royal supper was set forth and Henry comforted her tenderly.

“Do not fear, darling, do not fear,—what is a queen against my will?”

She roused herself, sheltering against his breast to ask one question—very pertinent.

“Heart of my inmost heart, since the Queen now knows—should I come to Court? Tell me and I obey.”

The wrinkle between his brows deepened.

“Why, yes! She does not know, nor Wolsey nor any. True she thinks you my mistress, and I would have you flaunt it that they may be the more misled. They will not believe I shall marry the woman whom Europe delights to dishonour. It is a good blind. Therefore come!”

But a painful one to Anne’s pride, though she recognized its truth. What would a queen’s seat be of whom Europe could say what she knew they said of her? Was she strengthening or weakening her position by returning? For once her instinct was at fault. Once more she questioned, but he was firm. Yes, she must return with added pomp and trumpeting. She objected faintly that the people would hate her. When had they seconded a mistress against a wife?

He answered briefly:

“There is no heart you cannot win. Shower mercies and charities to the rabble. Be decorous and obedient to the Queen, and all is well.”

A fortnight later she returned to London. But Wyatt had made no reappearance at Hever. Nor had he written.

Chapter Twelve

SHE returned brimming with pride, excitement, and a sense of her own consequence which might have led her into fatal mistakes if George's unusual gravity had not steadied her. He partly perceived the enormous issues involved and though he could not guess them all what he saw for the first time awed and steadied him. He came in one day to find her trifling with Mark Smeaton. They had had some toy squabble over the glorious Italian lute the King had given her long ago, and Mark was wagging his chin at her across a small table while she pelted him with pink and white comfits from a gold box with the King's enamelled picture. No harm in itself, but it culminated in Mark's vaulting the table, seizing her and carrying her round the room, she shrieking with laughter and struggling to get away from him. He swore he would never set her down unless she kissed him "for portorage," and she would have done it; her arm was about his neck; but that George dragged her roughly from him and cuffing his ears kicked him out of the room and banged the door. Mark would take anything from a gentleman. He went off whistling.

"Anne, you fool!—If the King had come instead of me——"

"He would have roared at it for a frolic!" she said indifferently, tossing the black-brown hair off her forehead.

George shook his head.

"Only a fool takes risks like that. I tell you a man has disowned his wife for less. What man likes a base-born rascal like Smeaton playing with his sweetheart? Let him stick to his lute! On that he is a master of men's hearts."

"And who used to talk of the republic of Art?" she retorted.

"You were not then the King's sweetheart, and I was younger. Incoming fortune steadies a man—he has the more to lose. Be wise! Hold your distance from free-mannered men like Mark. And what have you done to Thomas Wyatt? I cannot tell, but I swear he is a good fellow spoilt since you were last at Hever. Never shake your head! I know your work when I see it. God knows I see it often enough!"

She also saw the change in Wyatt but would not own it, and indeed it was difficult to define. He came with the rest to her gatherings and behaved pretty much as the rest behaved, but it was the difference now between the uninspired actor and the real man. She gave him plenty of chances to resume the lover, but he did not take them. He smiled, made a few not very humorous jests, and pushed no pawn on the board. She enlarged the opening by returning the verses he had lost at Hever (having taken a copy) with a sweet plaintive billet. She thanked him—Beautiful!—her heart reproached her. He replied by word of mouth and with George and Mark Smeaton present.

“They were written to a cold-hearted lady who sits beautiful as Hesper the Evening Star and as golden and remote, and what I lost was but a copy. She has the original—such as it is. None the less, I thank you, Anne.”

He passed his verses to George, and he to Mark Smeaton, and Surrey came in and later Henry—now judging himself a fine critic of the turn of a line—and their merits were discussed and they lost all significance and Anne smarted as if a nail had run into her shoe. It pinched her vanity to lose any worshipper and still more to be unable to sift him and know whether he was still hers at bottom or no. She had the folly to ask Mark his opinion, and he promised to take Wyatt alone and probe his heart, which he could not. But the story flew over the Court, and Wyatt, infuriated and morose, seeing himself mocked was neither the better nor the happier man. In truth she was the desire of his eyes and he could not empty his heart of her.

The King coming in one day told her before George that she turned all the young fellows’ heads and that Weston had no mind to his wife now because of her amber eyes. It was a jest, and Henry might feel it a feather in his cap that all hearts swayed to his chosen, but the times were serious, and through Anne’s pretty disclaiming George read no penitence. All that stuff was as native to her as water to a fish. She swam in it and beautifully, with graceful swoops and curves and soarings and divings, and it was hard to say her nay and almost impossible to counsel, so besotted was Henry on all she said and did. She ruled one of the three or four world rulers—and it was partly her reckless giddiness that had put the sceptre in her hand. She loved George if she loved a living thing, but—she went her own way and believed that her empire was eternal.

But tremendous issues were on them and more than even George guessed or Anne could weigh. Wolsey returned from France bristling with the importance of the push he had given the King’s “matter” with the Pope, and Henry summoned him to Greenwich Palace,—pleasant those late

autumn days with a low sun shining and the trees shedding their last gold into the rich bosom of mother earth,—pleasant by the great tidal river carrying England’s argosies to the further seas. In the panelled room opening on drifting sails Henry received him,—the great Cardinal a little aged by his cares, a little tremulous as to the hand, a little the worse for the fat living in Paris and the sparkling wines of France, but a pillar of the State still, astute, crooked, wise, hard to deceive, proud with the pride of a man who found his king and country small and has left them great. He made his report.

“And the matter works at Rome, your Grace, but cannot work swiftly because his Holiness is hard pressed at the notion of disowning the dispensation of his predecessor. Rome looks backward as well as forward, as right is, and a dispensation given at the beginning of the world is as precious with her as if written by St. Peter’s own hand.”

Henry snorted.

“Tell that to another, man! Not to me that have seen the backstairs working of Europe. But will they hear reason?”

Wolsey smiled his craftiest smile.

“Rightly handled, I judge so, your Grace. Why not? The Pope’s legate Cardinal Campeggio is adjudged to England to hear with me the case spread out before him and I believe is even now nearing Paris on his way. And this so encouraged my soul that I was the more moved to break it though very tenderly and cautiously with the French King about a marriage with Madame the Princess Renée who of all ladies is most surely the very one to please such a king as your Highness in beauty, wit, and merry behaviour shadowed with the stateliness that becomes a queen for all but her king.”

And with much more to the same purpose he concluded, smiling all over the broad pallor of his face.

But Henry sat silent. He could not blame Wolsey because he himself had deliberately made the French princess a stalking-horse to keep his suspicions off the fact that his known “darlyng” was also his wife to be. And yet he was as furious with Wolsey as if he had played that game on his own initiative and in his heart feared the inevitable moment now upon them. He said sullenly as was his manner when afraid:

“I am sick of the French princess and from a private hand have a very different story of her perfections. But, be that as it may, the time is now come that I shall open my mind to you, having another in view from the first.”

His long training stood the great Cardinal in good stead. He fixed his eyes composedly on Henry and in perfect silence. But his mind was ranging rapidly over the European princesses and dividing them into three classes. Those he would fight, those he must reject absolutely, those over whom he would temporize and consider. The first class was by far the largest. His mesh in Europe was so neatly woven that a slipped or knotted thread would spoil the whole pattern.

The colour flushed up Henry's face and even his bullneck as he tried to emulate his minister's composure and overdid it. In a hard metallic voice he continued:

"The wife I have chosen is one agreeable to myself, promising the bearing of healthy children and in perfections of mind and body second to none, but, rather, leading all. She is known to you and her heart to you is as good as my own—knowing your great service to me. She is Mistress Anne Boleyn."

Dead silence, and no gesture to cover its gauntness.

Henry took up a paper as if to scan it carefully, but it rattled in his hand, and he threw it down. The heart in him was a boy before the schoolmaster—or the criminal before the judge. Not before Katharine the Queen, not at any stage of the business had he until that minute realized the catastrophe of his madness for Anne. For Wolsey he was destroying the work of a lifetime, his own relations with the Emperor Charles, with the French King, with Rome, for the sake of the laughter in a woman's eyes, the softness of her slender body in his arms. For the first time his heart swelled to bursting with the sense of what she owed him, the terrible tie that bound and must bind them for ever together. He literally dared not look into Wolsey's face.

Presently it became necessary. The silence had lasted so long that it cut like a knife. It was evident that Wolsey could not speak. He himself must break the awful quiet. He looked across the table. The man's face was sallow-white. Some spring of hope had snapped. Something had gone out of it never to return. The yellow hand gripped the table-edge. Silence.

He summoned up his coarsest jovialest bluff. A "Pull yourself together, man! Never say die!" business; and laughed aloud.

"Why, what ado about nothing! If a king cannot please himself at bed and board, why then he is worse off than the lowest hind in the kingdom and might change places with him. How can a man get children if his wife is no more to him than a treaty or a dowry? Cheer up, my trusty servant! She shall love you as I do, and the two of us and our sons sing *Laus Deo* in thinking of you. Why, what is this?"

For a fit of cold trembling had seized Wolsey. His heart, tried with excess of the good and evil things of this world, had given him trouble of late, and this shock came like Death's forewarning. His teeth chattered in his head, his pallor was blue.

Henry snatched a cup and filled it with wine and held it to Wolsey's lips until his own unsteady hand could grip it. It was like life running down his throat, and presently his body steadied to meet the imperious demand of the brain. But it was slowly and heavily that he got himself on to his knees and stretched his hands like a beggar to Henry.

"Sire, I entreat you in the name of God's Passion to stop and consider! Fair and beautiful I own this lady—one in whom good gifts flourish profusely. Yet consider. To affront the world, to dispossess a mighty princess, the mother of the heir. To affront his Holiness—O my God, what words can paint the disaster! Sure a year of possession will open your eyes to the worth of the one set against the other, but then too late. When have I thwarted your wisdom and courage? Then hear me;—I would kneel here till Doomsday to shake your purpose."

He had perhaps a desperate hope that Henry would break out in a great guffaw of laughter and tell him it was one of the practical jests he delighted in. Silence again. And then without a moment's warning the tropic hurricane of royal fury broke upon him. His service was forgotten, his personal devotion scorned. The beast in the man bared its teeth and sprang on its prey, and the Cardinal knelt and endured.

Indeed he scarcely heard it. His mind was elsewhere. First, his own ruin stared him in the eyes. How the witch must have mastered him to bring a man like Henry to such madness! Instantly he remembered how she hated himself for his work with Percy and the open affront to her pride, and he knew though the phrase was far distant in the womb of time that Hell has no fury like a woman scorned. She would pay him her debt with red-hot coin of malice and vindictive hate in spite of all her artful smile.

Then in a mourning procession the victims of his blind folly fled across his vision. For this upstart harlot he had ruined the Queen and her daughter, exposed himself to the Emperor's wrath, insulted the French King, dragged himself in vain at the Pope's feet—he who himself had hoped for the See of Peter. He with his own hands had helped to build the steps by which Thomas Boleyn's daughter, the London mercer's great-granddaughter, would sit on the throne of England. Agony after agony, much not wholly selfish, besieged him, and still Henry stormed on, and still the broken man heard nothing until like a lightning flash he realized in his stupor that time was slipping away,

that if he did not lick the dust she would have his head as she had stolen all else. He knew Henry too well to doubt that issue, and the sheer terror of a man who flees for his life gripped him and gave him words.

“I beseech your Highness’s patience. Have mercy on a servant too old to take a stumble in his work lightly, yet faithful to death. It is but a stumble. If this is your royal will it is to be done if man can do it, and certainly the lady has all the virtues and shall be so represented in Rome and——”

A storm but a gradually subsiding one followed this, and Wolsey the Cardinal thanked an ironic Heaven that the remonstrance he had been about to make lamenting that the King’s secrecy with him had made so much work to be undone had not escaped his lips. No,—with Henry things must be taken as they came. Hungry dogs eat dirty pudding and that had often enough been Wolsey’s diet to use him to the meal.

Presently he asked leave to go—

“That I may consider with the Archbishop means to put this matter before Rome, and to compose a letter to the French King——”

“Not mentioning her name formally—not that!” Henry thrust in; “let that flea stick in the wall for awhile. Let it filter through gradually and be a rumour, a doubt, and then a thing done. With Rome that cannot be—and yet why not? No formal announcement yet. A process.”

Not a word but of agreement did Wolsey venture. Yes, so best! The King’s royal wisdom bettered his as so often before. And then he tottered off to his mule and his boat and so up the Thames to York House with his trusty henchman Thomas Cromwell seated beside him in the boat, and dared not open his heart to him until they reached his most private chamber. Then, like a fainting man, lying back in his chair he gasped out all and Cromwell—a younger man whose close dark eyebrows with stern and secret eyes still gaze at us from Holbein’s living portrait, heard with dumb horror. That a man, and that man Henry, could be found mad enough to pledge his all for a body already his (for so they thought) was as incredible to them as if the God they invoked so solemnly and believed in so little had made visible appearance before them. It could not be. Thomas protested, but Wolsey’s anguish affirmed its reality more brutally than oaths.

What to do?

If the Vatican knew the facts they would be ammunition to sharpen its resistance which Wolsey had half-wished before and now earnestly desired. Surely the Pope would refuse to be the Boleyn’s cat’s-paw and for that to infuriate the Emperor Charles! Dared they? Caution—caution! Were the

King to guess!—. In darkest secrecy—with a cipher which Wolsey used when his wisdom outran the King's—they compounded a brief message and sent it by a messenger who could be trusted to swallow it and have it carved out of his living bowels before he would betray his trust. With the French King he would follow Henry's bidding. That could wait. But to Campeggio, the coming Cardinal and judge, now nearing Paris he sent a message also. Some of his words would leak out under heavy warnings of secrecy and as they dropped rouse Europe to storms of laughter and derision that would waken the crowned fool to his folly.

Wolsey might have remembered how Henry's obstinacy and sullen temper fed on opposition, flourished and waxed fat on it. Cromwell reminded him again and yet again in hoarse whispers. But hope drove him.

And then Anne—what should they do with her?

Before they parted Wolsey had asked Henry whether he might make his "obedience" to her, and Henry graciously consented. Had Anne heard the terms in which Wolsey and Cromwell spoke of their future liege lady even her insensitive cheeks might have burnt flame-red. They raked up filth of which she was innocent together with biting truths of herself and her family, and of these compounded the dish to set before Campeggio. And when all this was done Wolsey sent for a box of jewels at random—he himself did not know what he possessed in his uncounted treasures—and plunging his hands in it drew out chains and pendants and brooches and rings until the table was inundated with the lights and perfections of glorious rubies and emeralds and all the flower-garden of earth's fiery heart—cold scentless blooms of pure colour with the lights dancing in them like the sun in dewdrops.

Strange to see the stern faces of the men bending over them! Nothing in Wolsey loved them save as means to an end. He hoarded them to use them as a part of his policy. Certainly they win men's hearts! He let them now slip smoothly through his fingers, pearls pale and moonlit as the flesh of women who had lain in his arms and rubies like their lips. Then he looked up.

"To waste them on a—— Well, will this do? Is it fine enough for lying Thomas Boleyn's wanton daughter?"

He held up a singular Indian head-dress of most intricately wrought gold set with rubies and emeralds—a thing not one woman in a million could wear, but which would make a marvellous heathen goddess of the millionth. Indeed it came from India, where one may see its like in Persian miniatures of languid dusky beauties who can scarcely walk for the weight of jewelled

fetters. Cromwell fingered it contemptuously. To him also such toys were nothing.

“You have good taste in women’s gear, your Grace. If she is to be won it should win her.”

They shovelled the rest back, and it was carefully cased and sent with such a letter as they hoped Henry would see, servile in its obedient joy in the King’s happiness. That should serve, if anything would divert Anne’s hatred.

It came to her as she and the King sat alone after supper that he might tell her of Wolsey’s defeat and of Campeggio’s coming. Both made her heart beat high, her cheeks crimson with feverish joy.

“We will conquer, my heart, we will conquer!” she said. “He must fight for us for he dares do no otherwise, but we must watch him, for if he dares he will cheat. He thinks he has ruled England till now. His arrogance that way is what men marvel at in the French Court, and your long patience with his pride. I have heard the French King say, ‘But it is noble in my brother Henry to be the servant of the Cardinal’s pride. It shows he is one that values an old servant.’ ”

“You have heard him say that?” Henry flashed.

“That and more, my life. But they know him for a man strong in will and crafty in devices, and so they say you must endure whether you will or no.”

He blustered at once:

“I’ll show them!—But no. Not till our matter is through. To that he shall put his best wits and then—according to his deeds be it unto him! But of all things, good sweetheart—as my own darling—humour the man, for we must have him now or be lost. It takes a fox to cheat a fox, and he is Churchman to the marrow of his bones!”

And it was at that moment that Wolsey’s gift made its appearance borne by no less a man than Cromwell—and hearing this Henry gave orders for his admittance to their presence. He entered habited in grave black velvet and bowing profusely. The scene that met his eyes was singular indeed. The great room was more magnificently set forth than before. She had found it so on her return from Hever as if to accustom her to royal splendours. Some of Wolsey’s own best tapestries had been carted up from Hampton Court, now the King’s property, to delight the pampered eyes of the favourite. They clothed the great walls sumptuously. On the floor were spread curtains from Hampton Court to serve her fair feet instead of the rushes which were good enough for all other palace dwellers except the Queen. Cromwell knew every one of them. How often had he not helped to inventory them with the

rest of the Cardinal's treasures! On the tables stood huge branching candelabra of pure gold. Cromwell could trace these also and noted with an inward jeer how bravely they illuminated the dusky loveliness of the favourite and glimmered in the folds of her golden gown. She sat in a great carved chair side by side with Henry's and on a parity with his—as King and Queen sit together—and the illusion was heightened by her head-dress, a golden circlet raying outward, extremely wide, and decorated with pearls. Her feet like the King's were set on a velvet footstool, and it needed only the sceptre and dove to make her to all appearance his queen.

And first, on his knee—though that might be taken for homage to the King—Cromwell tendered the Cardinal's letter to the hand heavy with great rings which she extended; she read it eagerly then passed it to the King. He read it as eagerly.

“By my soul, a very good and loving letter and pleasing to his prince in all he says and does. And so are the two I love best in the world good and perfect friends as I would have them! Is it not so, sweetheart?”

Anne agreed with gracious warmth and pretty sighs of impatience and flutterings over the precious unopened box.

“Indeed my Lord Cardinal is my very good friend, and I know it, and his gift shall be dearly welcome.”

Cromwell, still on his knees, crouched and opened the box with the aid of a knife to cut the strings. Henry made some laughing remonstrance about knives cutting love, but the deed was done and the head-dress drawn forth—a flash gorgeous as the peacock in sunlight with his many-coloured jewels. She uttered a scream of delight and leaping from her throne made for the great Venetian mirror presented to the King by Venice, that she might put it on instantly. What woman's heart could resist such a magnificence? Securing it, she turned and faced them, all a-sparkle with delight. Henry looked fondly at her.

“Tell my Lord Cardinal with my commendations that it suits her as though the craftsman had seen the face it was to frame,” he said, rubbing his great hands with what seemed a schoolboy's glee. And Cromwell on his knees murmuring thanks and humilities was obliged to own in heart as well as speech that it did so.

For it aureoled her dark hair and brilliant face against gold and jewels as the Virgin's head in a Greek icon is set against a stiffly circling and spreading halo. Her gown was gold. It fell about her like fire on the crimson velvet floor-cloths, and Wolsey's gift completed the stiff splendour. The King breathed hard, and even Cromwell's heart quickened by a beat. For the

first time he understood, though he could not share the madness that was driving Henry to crumble the whole world to pieces if thus and no otherwise he could win this creature of flame and colour. She had the fairy flute in her voice to which all men dance at its first breath, the elfin magic in her eyes that lights the way to strange places. Could any wonder that kingship had not saved the King? His own heart subsided to its slow march, and again he was outside the magic circle. How few years would blunt the point of that fine arrow! Kingdoms and lordships survive, but Beauty passes, and new faces dim the old ones. Love's kingdom is a river for ever shifting its banks, for ever flowing, and never and ever the same. Worthless in the real and abiding concerns of men, thought Cromwell, recovering sanity.

She wrote some hasty profuse words and showed them to Henry who smiled well-satisfied and himself handed them to Cromwell, adding his own thanks,—indeed he scrawled a message and his signature at the end. But the true thanks Cromwell would take back to York House were in Anne's eyes as she turned from the glass. He rode back, slowly sifting his impressions. A girl, though imperious and tyrannical,—a fool, though quick-witted as the flick of a snake's tongue. A beauty, set off with the charm that draws like a magnet even from the face of a plain woman—and charm is no monopoly of beauty's but combined with it is invincible. Against these weapons he set thoughtfully and coldly her vulnerable points.

Her loveliness, of the quick vividness that fades early; and the very little goitrous enlargement of the beautiful throat which his weasel eye had detected between the pearls might well enlarge further and restore Europe to sanity. He had seen the thing in Derbyshire—a bag from which the eye turned, loathing. Also it might portend the sly insidious growth of some disease to eat inwardly—the worm at the rose's heart. He wondered how she carried it off with the King. Counting, he was disposed to think that in ten years—may be sooner—most men would not think her worth a toss!

Then her wits.—Yes, but only a woman's wits, to be easily flurried and worsted when matched against the slow involved dull power of the means by which men attain their goals. She would flash and dart bird-like and drop exhausted, while he himself, for instance, plodded on heavy but unwearied. He did not fear her there. So in thought he measured swords against her, knowing that with her good will Wolsey's must soon rust, and why not he as well as another to seize and burnish it?

He returned to York House full of comfort for the Cardinal, and they sat together and drank and plotted until Wolsey fell asleep from exhaustion and

his grey head lolled helplessly in his chair—a fear to no man, an ugly and piteous sight.

But Anne, aureoled beside the King, heard news to please her well. She had demanded that her father should be raised in the peerage. She was tired of being “Mistress Anne” like a nobody. It was done at her will. Her father was immediately to be created Earl of Wiltshire, and the rest would fall into shape. George would have the courtesy title of Lord Rochford. She would be my Lady Anne. Good advancement with so much more to come!—and the more so because the peerage carried with it substantial additions in land to the family income. But much will have more, and she was dipping her hands freely into Henry’s Privy Purse and he his into the nation’s half-starved pockets—for times were hard with the people and that plague—“the sweating sickness”—beginning to lour over London—the invariable centre of infection. He had his full share of cares for her wand to charm away.

She went to Simonette as usual with all her news of men and things, and Simonette smiled and encouraged. She was whitening and bloating on her fine position at Court, developing a rich taste in dress as became her lady’s confidential attendant. Confidential, that is, so far as love-affairs, dress, and all the minor interests go. As yet Anne had restrained herself from any political confidences, and there Simonette asked no questions—and kept her thoughts to herself. Anne supposed she knew nothing. Simonette, believing that love-affairs are as often as not the handle to a political situation, was content with what came her way, which indeed was much beyond what Anne guessed, and waited—waited.

There was no doing of Anne’s on which she did not keep her vigilant eye—Mark Smeaton, Weston, Brereton—all;—she lived in their drama night and day. But most of all she watched George with steady unblinking watchfulness. For, for a grudge and a false kiss long ago and less than nothing to him now, she hated him with Hell’s own hatred.

Part Three

Chapter Thirteen

IF ANNE had expected that the mere mention of Rome's inquest would terrify Queen Katharine into submission and retreat to a convent she found herself mistaken on her return. She had often assured the King that so it must be. Fear for money provision, even for her own life and the Princess Mary's, would settle that question. Henry shook his head gloomily. A man who has lived with his wife for twenty years is a better judge of her obstinacy than any outsider, and he believed that Katharine, unless for love's sake, would hold out to the end. What she might do for love of him he could not tell, but no man is ever stunned by the renunciations a woman may make in his favour, and there remained a faint hope of the amazing abnegation and self-effacement that sometimes seize a woman of her type like a religious insanity.

After all, who but he should be her religion? Anne's words were certainly suggestive and it would be possible to blame Katharine very gravely if she did not worship and relinquish him as she ought. As he told Anne—and did not blush to tell—she was a woman very simply loving and dutiful, not regarding herself but considering the pains of others rather than her own. And it would seem perfectly reasonable to him had she seen the matter through his eyes as she had done all else and so departed with tender tears and benedictions to the conventual life. Yet it was difficult to be hopeful. Anne encouraged that very flickering hope. It is amazing that people do not see their duties as clearly as we see them. For what are religion and its open profession if not for that?

“When I consider her very constant masses and confessions——” said Anne toying with a plumed fan of feather set with crystals in gold. “Surely a saint may set an example!”—But Henry looked uneasy. Even still the fading effigy of the Queen was decked in the rags of respect. And it was on thin ice that Anne trod when Katharine was named.

The course the Queen took was equally simple and disconcerting. On hearing that Campeggio and Wolsey were to try the case she sent for her confessor the pure-spirited Bishop Fisher and secured him as her defender.

She then, but with perfect patience and dignity, called upon Henry to put the matter before her in all its details. No demand could have more perplexed him and his party. She had nothing to hide. Her cards were on the table for all Europe to see. Theirs were up their sleeves, and only the violence of disappointment would force them out one by one and disclose the cheats and evasions of the game they were playing. Therefore she was as frank as the other side was secret.

“And what did the Lord Cardinal counsel?” Anne demanded when Henry rolled into her presence sore to the bone with the Queen’s “insolence.” Even at her he snapped in that bitter moment when he realized that the struggle would resolve itself into a duel, with Europe on Katharine’s side and on his own the partisans whose self-interest called them to his standard. It was an ugly business stated as the Queen and her friends would state it. He had had the fresh confidence in his case of a client who walks full of spring and certainty into his lawyer’s office. Unanswerable arguments! Public sympathy! a foregone conclusion! Hurrah! Now, as the same client sits crestfallen before the awful table and hears his legal friend’s cool survey of both sides, his confidence was slowly disintegrating and the process was so uncomfortable that even Anne must bear the brunt with him.

“Why, as to Wolsey!—” he answered, “he knows as I know that so great a matter cannot be at the mercy of a woman’s follies and conceits. It concerns the kingdom more than myself. Therefore it was judged fitting that I should reply to her that I intended and would do nothing but to sift out the truth of our marriage and that such doubts never came at all in my own head but were put there by the doubts of legality expressed by the Bishop of Tarbes, so much so that unless settled they might hinder the fitting marriage of our daughter. And this she took for truth—as in a fashion it is—and after a short tragedy was pacified. Whereby we may hope for some peace while the matter proceeds.”

He wiped the sweat from his forehead—the thing had to be done, and he did it but would have given much that the celebrated doubts had raised themselves in Katharine’s mind rather than his. A saint?—it should have been so! She appeared strangely callous and lacking in delicacy in a case where she should have been all delicacy and scruple.

“And I perceive too that she begins to have stings for me, and no doubt she has her spies as well as another!” said Anne raising dewy eyes to his face. “She has her friends behind her or she would never have insulted me as she did but yesterday, and I call God to witness I never deserved it!”

Henry stared confusedly at her. He felt he was entering that devastating No-Man's Land where wife and mistress play against each other for victory and the man who takes sides looks a fool to the callous and giggling world. Surely decency should shroud these conflicts in more than midnight darkness! The follies of women!

"And what did she say?" he asked trying to control himself. "I thought, and yourself has told me, that she has never made sign or motion to offend you, much less a word, and treated you like any other maid about her."

"And it was true! I knew she dared not, and judge if something we do not know has not given her courage! She was playing at cards with me and another and suddenly laying down her cards she looked me in the face—full—and said, 'My Lady Anne, you have the good luck always to stop at a king; but you are like others—you will have all or nothing!' And all were silent, and I knew the blood ran to my face and none to defend me from her tongue! A sorrowful moment for one who loves you better than her life and has laid her fair fame at your feet!"

"She shall pay for it," said the much disquieted Henry. "I know how to guard my sweetheart. And, now I think of it, you shall attend her no more. These palaces are all ears and eyes, and you shall have your own house in London, and there we can meet as husband and wife shortly to be and all go smoothly. This life here wears a man to the bone."

His choleric temper was much inflamed at this time. The delay of the legate together with Katharine's resistance made him nervous as a kitten. What!—if she, hitherto all mildness, dared to confront him it must be because of some hidden weakness in him which she and others saw fatally clearly though he was ignorant of it. That panic would have made Anne agree to the proposal even if it had not flattered her to the highest pitch to dream of a rival court all splendour, with the King and herself at the head of it and Katharine's deserted, desolate. She was drunk at this time with what she had achieved and the near prospect of the summit and pride coruscated about her in almost visible rays. Even Simonette said sometimes:

"Go more humbly, Anne. Or at the least more discreetly. Do not be a queen until the crown is on your head. It angers those you dare not rebuke until then."

"There are different ways of queenship," Anne said indifferently to the smooth white witch at her side, "and in mine there is none to rival me."

Therefore she knelt in her favourite pose before the enamoured Henry, her arms on his knees, and promised to go to London or anywhere—

“So only I have the light of mine eyes beside me. O, what a master is Love that I—who thought of you once but with duty as a subject should—even though I had heard of your kingly perfections—now live in your life and in your death will die.”

At the same time she made it clear that the establishment in London must be magnificent.

“Not but what a cottage with you were sweet, but since I am the King’s friend there is nothing too good for me!”

It was charmingly said and winged with a dark glance from under lashes like black reeds hiding the sparkle of running water.

“There is nothing good enough for my darling!” he said fondly. “Will Suffolk House serve? And I tell you for why. It stands hard by York House, and this I can borrow of Wolsey, and so we shall be near together and I can slip to and fro unseen. Much secrecy is needed when the legate comes. It is true it belongs to the bishopric of York, but none the less Wolsey will lend it. Has he sent you a token of late, my own dear heart? Keep well with him of all things. It shall bring us much good.”

Anne did not tell him that she had troubled her head very little about Wolsey and had passed over more than one token with indifference. She feared him no longer, and as usual her fearlessness touched hands with recklessness. He was a relic of the past. Newer men were coming up. But at the King’s request, pouting and struggling, because Henry liked these little femininities, she promised and that day as the King was going to dinner with her spoke gracefully to one of Wolsey’s adherents, saying with one of her darting smiles:

“I am a sorrowful woman this day, Mr. Heneage, and my meat does me no good because I believe his Grace has again utterly forgotten his humble daughter. Surely I thought Forest would have brought me a token from him, but he never came near me, and for sure that was the reason. He dared not tell me my Lord Cardinal has clean forgotten me.”

Heneage bowed, protested, and fled off to tell Wolsey how cleverly my Lady Anne had put the blame on innocent shoulders. The Cardinal hurried to his stores to fish out a ring which should delight even those appraising eyes and sent it with a letter of devotion to wring heart’s blood from a stone. She wrote back with exaggerated submission and the compliment of asking a further favour. Would his Grace bestow upon her Lenten table a morsel of the delicious tunny that always graced his? And chafing, entirely undeceived, he sent it lavishly as he would have sent anything she asked for. His case was pitiable, “between the devil and the deep sea,” as he put it.

Rome was certainly ocean-deep, but it might be that the devil in the shape of a beautiful woman was deeper still. At least he understood the one, the other he feared with the exceeding great fear of uncomprehension.

While the move to London was pending she retreated to Hever, for Henry would have her no longer about the Queen though she still held the title of maid of honour. She went very gladly for more reasons than one. Her attendance about the Queen, however slight, galled her pride past endurance, and there was something in those royal disillusioned eyes which at times made her feel herself a child playing with crowns and sceptres, ignorant of their true value. Those eyes said silently but clearly as they rested reflectively upon her:

“In me you see the fruit of what you desire!”—and then passing her over fell into yet deeper, sadder contemplation. The Princess Mary shuddered from her visibly. How could she approach her mother’s murderess? For under the bitter strain the Queen faded daily, and knew what eager hopeful eyes watched her sinking forces.

So that was well over. And there was yet another reason for Hever. A dark and deadly cloud of sickness hung over London. The sweating sickness having first showed its teeth now sprang at the throat of the narrow-streeted and unwholesome city, and it was certain that Henry’s terror of any form of epidemic would soon send the Court scampering off to one of the further palaces for safety. Also Hever lies within reach of Allington, and she ached to see Wyatt with a restlessness quite disproportioned to any real care she had for him.

She went down in almost royal state attended by her “musicianers” of whom Smeaton was one. How endure the country quiet without music, dancing, and cards in the long evenings? It was spring again—the merry month of May, and Hever woods were garlanded to greet their Queen of May, but what were their blackbirds and thrushes to Mark’s passionate French love-songs with the deep bourdon of his lute?

Wild gaiety and frolics reigned at Hever. The cat was away, for her father and his wife were at Blickling. George was with the King, and Anne was Queen of Misrule at Hever and none to say her nay.

She sent a message to Mary Wyatt. Was True Thomas at Allington? If so, they had music at Hever to ravish a mermaiden from her own singing, and in the muniment room she had found old papers relating to the pride of the Wyatt family in the thirteenth century. Would he not come?

Mary wrote innocently back that her brother had not been at Allington for a month of Sundays and she imagined that the King must have taken

some light displeasure at him because he was very assiduous just now to be about his Grace's person.

That set her thinking and gossiping with Mark Smeaton. What could it be? Could Mark set his court-scavengers (for so she called them) to find out what had happened? It caused her no uneasiness, but still Wyatt was Wyatt, and she would like to know.

Mark Smeaton promised, sitting with her in the little chamber the King knew so well, long after the castle had gone to bed. With her help he had composed a set of charming songs to be danced and acted from the French romance of *Aucassin and Nicolette*, and they often sat up together alone in moonlight when all else were asleep. His odd satyr face and the melancholy, fierce, mad, gay ways of him fascinated the something elfish in herself which made a slave of Henry. He was a pleasure, a drug she could not deny herself though she was not in love with him as men count love, and at Hever she took her surfeit. He was at her heels night and day, and Wyatt's refusal threw her still more upon Smeaton. Simonette remonstrated:

"Why throw away a king for the Court fool? The King's jester—a fellow in motley and cap and bells! No more. You sow the wind, Anne. What of the whirlwind?"

Anne shrugged her shoulders and went off to Smeaton. Hever was her play after hard work at Court. She had earned it. There were no spies there!

Were there not? A more convenient nook for confidences than the King's little room could not have been found, sweet with moonlight blanching the hue of pink roses to moon-washed white, and Mark touching soft chords on the King's lute. He sat on the broad window-seat and Anne in its opposite corner, knowing it was madness to grant him these graces and therefore granting even more than she herself desired—reckless in enjoyment. She had shaved many dangerous turns. Why not this? She did not know that the roses hid more than their buds.

"Anne, my fellow has come back from London, and there is much talk there of Wyatt and the King's Grace—a very merry jest and you in it!"

"I?" She sat bolt upright, a lovely dark-eyed ghost in her shadowy corner and white satin.

"You. Hear the facts and shake in your velvet shoes!"

He touched a chord lazily on the lute. She jumped up and shook him to shake out the story and he caught and kissed both her hands—the one with Wolsey's jewel.

“I will tell if you will promise a kiss to your story-teller at the end. I am your minstrel, your troubadour. Fair ladies rewarded them thus when love was a grace instead of a lust.”

“I promise. Go on!” She was not in the least agitated. She knew the King. She knew Wyatt. No harm could come there.

“Well, Lady of Lutes, it happened as it might have happened in the Dark Ages that King Arthur and Sir Lancelot played at bowls and both loved my Lady Guinevere of all women loveliest and—as true as the rest of her steadfast sex. Here is the stage set for a handsome quarrel. They were not alone. Other Knights of the Round Table were present such as my lord the Duke of Suffolk and that doughty warrior Sir Francis Bryan. Four good men and true, mighty with sword and shield—fair mirrors of chivalry! My lord King Arthur cast his bowl and declared that, as he was crowned king, it had surpassed Wyatt’s cast by a hair’s-breadth. A mere courtier would have yielded. Not so our trusty knight! Wyatt and his partner debated it—a delicate question. King Arthur, proud of more than his cast, pointed with his finger on which he wore Queen Guinevere’s ruby, saying with a very significant smile:

“ ‘Wyatt, I tell you it is *mine!*’ ”

“Well, and what then? It is what he would say, and the whole thing a jest,” said Anne laughing. “It would be a needle in Sir Lancelot’s heart. He knows that ring. Sing again, Mark!”

She began humming:

*“Nicolette, the fairest fair,
Wandered in the garden there.
Sweet her eyes and sweet her mouth
Fragrant of the rosy South.”*

Mark continued sarcastically:

“Aye, sing while you may! King Arthur once condemned Guinevere to be burnt alive though she was his heart’s heart! Anyhow—Sir Lancelot considered and drew from the breast of his cassock a gold tablet with a long chain——”

He heard a smothered cry as Anne started beside him. Not a word.

“Well—and says he: ‘If your Majesty will give me leave to measure the cast with *this* I have good hopes it will yet be mine! And so down on his marrow-bones and began busily measuring the space between the bowls.

“ ‘The game is mine!’ says he!”

Mark Smeaton more felt than heard the mutter of "Traitor! Liar!" between her teeth and was delighted.

To his mocking loveless spirit mischief was the bread of life. His soul licked its cynical lips over it. He went on:

"And seeing and hearing, King Arthur kicked the bowl with his sound leg saying:

" 'It may be so, but then I am deceived!' and so broke up the revels and off with him to his chamber. His brow cast shadows like a frowning mountain. There is the story for you, Anne, and the sting in its tail! But since you can disarm it with a kiss what matter? Give me mine!"

She let him take it with a most discouraging indifference—her mind elsewhere. He used the circumstance to put his arm about her waist.

Yes—a week had gone by without a letter from Henry.—Could it be? Presently she rose, pushing Mark from her but without anger—only as a table or chair is pushed aside to give free exit.

"You have done me good service, Mark, and I tell you the man is an arrant liar. He took the thing from me by force because I would have none of him. Well, here is your kiss for fee."

He took it, saying he was well paid with those he had already had, and she neither hearing nor heeding went off and left him to the moonlight and nightingales—a company not wholly to his taste, for he took himself away to bed and the cup of wine that stood beside it. He was never sure whether Anne or wine was the headier drink.

She wrote a few words, sent Simonette to rouse a sleeping man, and ordered him to mount and ride instantly for London. In ten minutes, rubbing the sleep out of his eyes, he was in the saddle and cantering off with an armed fellow. A letter to Henry.

Not a word in the letter of Wyatt—only a cry to come when he could. She had dreamed he was ill. She had been ill; she had feared it was the sweating sickness and had therefore said no word, for it would kill her outright to see him run into danger. But now there was no fear of that disease, though she was very weak and languid. Would he come—not as soon as her heart desired—but soon? All night she trembled not with fear but rage at Wyatt and his dangerous trick. He might think he was paying off old scores, but she would show him!

It was Anne's way that her fright rebounded in recklessness. The castle was filled with riot during the days when she waited for the King's answer and Wolsey's and the other spies (some of them among her intimates) would

have a fine tale to tell! They played boisterous games and pulled one another about. They dived into the wardrobe-chests of bygone Boleyn ladies and found them richly stored with splendid goods from the fine old City merchant's counters, long-wearing gorgeous dresses of brocade from the looms of Ghent and Bruges. Dressed in these they careered about the rooms, shouting, playing charades and forfeits of the most irreverent.

"I am one that would die jesting!" she said merrily to Mark while he and she plotted charades together, and he believed it to be literally true. Simonette entreated moderation and might as well have addressed her complaints to the moon.

Next day came a line, crossing her own, from Henry to say he had grave cause for disturbance on his mind on which he would write to her at full length shortly and desired a plain answer. She took it to Simonette who looked darkly anxious upon it. Anne only laughed.

"My letter is an arrow aimed straight at his heart. See if I do not hit the bull's-eye!"

"If you do, you have still looked into destruction's eyes and deserve no better!" retorted Simonette. She desired yet dreaded this wave of success where Anne rode triumphing. She needed a lesson for her soul's sake, thought Simonette, yet what lesson would serve?

The answer came at earliest speed. In French as usual.

The anxiety my doubts about your health gave me disturbed me terribly and I should have had no peace without certain news of you. But since you have as yet felt nothing I hope things are with you as with us. When we were at Walton two ushers, two *valets de chambre* and your brother fell ill but are now quite well. There is another thing which may comfort you, which is that in this distemper few or no women have had it, and besides few persons of our Court or others have died of it. For which reason I entreat you, my entirely beloved, not to fright yourself or be too unhappy at our absence for wherever I am I am yours. So comfort yourself and take courage and make this misfortune as light to yourself as you can for I hope soon to make you sing "*Le renvoyé*."

She carried it off with showers of jests to Simonette. Had she not shaved the corner very neatly? She showed it to Mark Smeaton, boasting that she could do anything with Henry and that besides, in this matter she had not

been guilty of even coquetry, as she would shortly make him see. He told her carelessly that to a face like hers all things were possible, even to the moving of mountains, adding with equal carelessness that he had news from London that her sister Mary's husband Carey had died of the sweating sickness and therefore the Court would certainly move.—The King was as frightened of the sickness as a witch of holy water! Men were laughing and declaring that he never had slept two nights in the same bed since it began.

“But it will never come here, Anne!” he added. “Hever meads are wide. We are safe here.”

Yet that very night and suddenly—in the midst of the revels which the unlucky Mary's loss did not interrupt—Anne was stricken. It took her bronchially; her lungs were her weak point; and in twenty-four hours she was in danger.

They sent an express to Henry and equally by express his favourite doctor, Butts, appeared and with him a tender letter. But Simonette marked and noted it later to Anne that even in her extremity Henry would not face the sickness beside her.

“From which we may draw a lesson!” said Simonette, relapsing into meditative silence.

Anne drew none. Butts or her constitution had saved her, and the letter fostered her inordinate pride and security. It was in his usual amorous vein, ending:

I hope to see you soon again which will be a greater comfort to me than all the precious jewels in the world. Written by that secretary who is and ever will be your loyal and most assured servant.

Wolsey, taking no chances, wrote her a flattering and devout letter on the subject of his anxiety about her health, charging her in all things to care for herself as the jewel and delight of all eyes and the desire of their hearts. And it amused and delighted her exceedingly, when she could leave her bed, to deck the precipice to which she was leading him with a few more rosy garlands. Henry who had ridden to Hever directly the risk of infection was over entered as she was in the midst of it and leaned over her shoulder after the first greeting to see. And thus she threw dust in the eyes of the Enemy.

MY LORD,

In the most humble manner that my heart can think I beg you to pardon me that I am so bold as to trouble you with my simple writing, proceeding as it does from her who desires much to know that your Grace does well which I pray God to continue, as I am most bound to pray. For do I not know the great pains and trouble you have taken for me both day and night is only to be recompensed on my part by my loving you (next to the King's Grace) above all creatures living. My lord, I do assure you that I long to hear from you news of the legate for if the news come from you I do hope it shall be very good, and I am sure you desire it as much as I, and more if it be possible, as I know it is not. And thus remaining in a steadfast hope I make an end of my letter.

Written with the hand of her that is most bound to be——

And here Henry snatched the pen from the hand he kissed and finished it for her:

The writer of this letter would not cease until she had obliged me likewise to set my hand to it, desiring you though it be short to take it in good part. I assure you that both of us greatly desire to see you and are joyous to hear that you have escaped this plague so well, trusting the fury of it to be past. Not hearing of the legate's arrival causes us to ponder, but we trust by your diligence and vigilance (with the assistance of Almighty God) shortly to be eased of that trouble. No more to you at this time but that I pray God to send you as good health and prosperity as the writer wishes.

By your loving sovereign and friend H. R.

Did Wolsey believe the protestations? Yet in Henry's heart, though assaulted night and day with the most subtle insinuations, some loyalty did survive. It was not one to whom it is nothing to cast aside a friend and faithful servant. Not yet.

Anne, laughing with glee, said it would keep the old man quiet as she folded and secured the letter with deft fingers.

"And now there is another matter, my lady and my friend," said Henry seriously. "I had a little displeasure at you in the matter of Tom Wyatt, and I had intended to take you to task on it, but that your letter came telling me of your weariness and illness, and that drove all else from my heart but care for mine own darling and sweetheart. Still, between a loving pair should be no

concealment, and I pray you to open your dear heart to me as I to you. What reason had the fellow for his mad boasting?"

He told her the story as Smeaton had told it, flushing and puffing in the very remembrance, a dark something on his brow that Anne read rightly as Wyatt's condemnation if he offended again. She answered, frail as a white dark-pencilled violet after her late illness, but with the pride of outraged innocence.

"My liege and love, you do well to be angry with Thomas Wyatt, and I tell you now and he dares not deny it that he has been a very traitor to me that knew him from my child's days and trusted him as I do my brother, no more, no less. But it is very true that I did not tell you he loved me, for if I told you all the men that so profess the list would be long indeed. He alone knows how I have warned and checked him for pity's sake of our old friendship. But one day, not so long since, here at Hever, he came upon me in the herb-garden, and because I would have none of him he tore this tablet from me before I knew what he would be at, saying he would at least have a keepsake of mine, and though I ordered him to give it to me saying it was your precious gift he would not, and so off he went, and not a word have I had with him in private since nor has he written, though he came to my rooms at Court with others. There has my love the whole story of a loving fool!—Shame that I should call him such, for in other things he is both wise and witty and his verses honey."

Her voice had the ring of truth very creditably seeing how little went to alloy the lie. "Dear love, how like you this?" rang in her own ears as she spoke, but without ruth or repentance. Still she had saved his life. Henry was thunderously satisfied. The fool! "But love discontented makes men madmen." The tablet must be demanded and there let it end.

"Had I asked for his head in payment for his insult I could have had it," she told Simonette, "and under the King's eye I wrote at once a brief command that the tablet be returned to me and my name never henceforth to pass his lips except in the way of friendship. All which I would restore to him if my command was obeyed and his duty to his gracious sovereign remembered. Lord, the fools that men are!"

"Women too can be fools!" said Simonette, who knew much more of the history of Wyatt's love than would ever reach the King's ear. "And if you trifle with Wyatt more, Anne, the day is not too far when he may thank God on his knees that you ousted him from your favour. I have told you and I say again that with Mark and Norris and Brereton and Weston—not to mention more of the men you have here and about you always—if the King knew

their freedoms with you your favour with him would not be worth a day's purchase. Remember the man loves you!"

It roused Anne to one of her swift perilous angers:

"What, you French slut—and you that know me pure as I came from my mother! You that I have lowered myself to honour with my trust! And to talk of freedoms! I tell you that if I heard a dog open its mouth to bark against me I could and would make it rue the day. Freedoms indeed! And what have you seen but honest mirth and merrymaking?"

Much more she said in a fine flow of anger, and Simonette paled a little in hearing but not with fear. Of late there had been more than one outburst. Anne's nerves like Henry's were frayed with waiting and watching for the legate who delayed so unaccountably in France. After the first she had repented and asked pardon of Simonette in the name of old friendship. Afterwards it had been sufficient to toss her a gift with a jesting word. Simonette took the gift and smiled with pale tightened lips. She was one whose anger drew the blood back always to her heart instead of sending it in quick flame to illumine her cheeks. Such folk trace descent from the cold snake in Eden bowers, lolling his jewelled head upon the tree among the fruit and surveying the pair at work sharing his apple. But she had put her money on Anne, so to speak, and would not lose her investment.

So far it was a safe one. With her own eyes she beheld almost daily what du Bellai the French Ambassador had written secretly to his own government:

Mademoiselle de Boulain has returned to Court, and I believe the King to be so infatuated with her that God alone could abate his madness.

On that point God was certainly not invoked, except possibly by Wolsey whose faith in Deity was not his strongest point. And meanwhile Europe held its breath and waited as spectators of a great drama. How would it end? How much could a king dare to affront the conscience of the civilized world? The Queen was left alone at Greenwich. Anne held Court in London as near to Henry as they could contrive. He had given her a part of the revenues of the Bishopric of Durham, and Durham House itself was put at the service of her father in hopes that that would satisfy her and his presence safeguard appearances when the legate arrived. But it would not do. Like Alexander she must reign, and she must reign alone, and the King set

Wolsey to work to find a casket worthy of his jewel and Suffolk House was at last achieved in the teeth of much difficulty and opposition and Henry's own doubts as to its wisdom. But he wrote with his slavish subjugation to lay it at her feet.

DARLING, As touching a lodging for you we have gotten one by my Lord Cardinal's means the like of which could not have been found hereabouts for many reasons, as the bearer shall tell you. As touching our other affair I assure you there can be no more done nor more diligence used so that I trust it shall be hereafter to both our comforts.

And with the Cardinal's agreement Henry settled himself into York House close by, that their meetings might be as secret and easy as possible. She was riding him now no longer with a light hand on his mouth but with whip and spur, urging him almost beyond his strength, tantalizing him with sweetnesses that as yet he dared not snatch, parching his mouth with thirst yet holding the political necessity between them as part of her own game. He rebelled yet agreed. If she were now to bear a child the consequences might be disastrous to both their hopes. If she did not bear one it would shatter his own to dust. He literally dared not face the issue, and on that she played. All gained, what is left to give? But her pride swelled daily.

Again du Bellai wrote to his masters:

Mademoiselle de Boulain has arrived and the King has placed her in very fine lodgings immediately adjoining his own and there every day more court is paid to her than she ever paid to the Queen.

Why not? Mademoiselle de Boulain must have her ladies and her train-bearers and her chaplains. She was openly the uncrowned Queen, and like a foreign sovereign she graciously visited the neighbouring palace of Greenwich for Christmas merriment, though the sad Queen refused to see her and lived apart amid the pity of all English hearts who heard. In Anne's party hearts figured chiefly on their cards.

England rang with her name and not with loyalty. The English people have a sense of justice that not even beauty can charm away, though she dispensed her charities and generously, for avarice was never one of her failings. She left that to Simonette, who was steadily amassing and

dispatching to France a very respectable fortune to the care of her relatives near the Tuileries.

But give as Anne would, still the ominous murmur grew—"We will not have Nan Bullen to be our queen!"

"Nan Bullen, forsooth!" and such plain speaking as might blister the ears of those who heard if they valued her a flick of their fingers. She, at least, was too preoccupied to know or care for "the foul-mouthed rabble." What are they to kings' favourites?

Chapter Fourteen

THE legate had arrived with Wolsey, and according to the astuteness of Rome he and not Wolsey was constituted the head of the Commission. Pope Clement would not choose for that post a man wholly under the turn of Henry's screw, for that might bring disaster and the black displeasure of Queen Katharine's nephew the Emperor Charles to whom the Pope must be subservient. In his secret heart Wolsey rejoiced at this, though to Henry he deplored it. He knew himself broken in the strength which wears responsibility like a flower, and though he would be blamed, possibly ruined, either way, his chance would be greater with Campeggio as the head and front of the offending, for Wolsey knew well what was decreed at Rome—delay, delay, and evermore delay.

As for Anne, after stormy discussion she was despatched to Hever much against her will. It infuriated her that Henry should seem ashamed of her. How was she to make her appearance as Queen from a hole-and-corner intrigue? The position she took was that if the marriage were a nullity there was no reason why she should not be Queen already, and to that end Henry should marry her privately and stand the brunt. But there, strengthened by Wolsey and such common sense as she had left him, he was adamant. He would have no quarrels over the legitimacy of the Prince of Wales she was to bear him. She like himself must endure until Rome or another opened the way for formally discarding Katharine. And that being so she must leave London. It cost more than one love-storm (as the snake-mouthed Simonette called them), but Henry won, and Anne made her yielding so lovely that the tears stood in his eyes when she went sorrowfully away (with Smeaton and much other consolation in her train) and he set himself to face the public issue.

Indeed, she left a world in tumult behind her in London! The events of the last few days had tried Wolsey sorely—and inspired him with a half-despairing wish that he could have been on the Queen's side. Not for the sake of ruth or honesty but because the eyes of the world were on this duel, and he foresaw present and historic contempt for Henry. It was too obvious, lustful, and hypocritical. It stank in the nostrils of men like Thomas More

and Bishop Fisher, who wore the world's homage like a jewel to be forgotten—so far were they above it. Wolsey himself envied them, if he could have had it with Henry's favour—his more immediate need. Alas, how incompatible! He was Henry's hound, no more, and so the world took him. Had he been on the Queen's side, how calm and confident his heart, how he could have towered in eloquence, on what heartstrings of fidelity and duty he could have played, how he could have called a much-invoked and hardly worked God to witness, with something more than the tongue in his cheek he used daily now! Even the most hardened statesman may be glad sometimes of a little solid honesty to buttress his position and the economy of truth on Henry's side was tragic; there was not enough to furnish so much as a decent *façade*—while as for foundations—! At every double in pursuit of light-heeled truth and consistency Anne's flaming youth and beauty barred their way and back they must double to seek another refuge in outraged decency, and find every earth stopped that could shelter them! Whatever they put forward of conscientious scruples Europe and England tittered back—"But—the Concubine?" (for so they called her) and what could the Churchmen answer? Wolsey loathed her to hell.

It had been a sickening business for him to attend the King in the assembly of his nobles, the Judges, and Council, at the Bridewell Palace and to assume a gravely sympathetic air in listening to the speech delivered by Henry to a breathless audience with an air of funereal pomp at which men winked and nudged. His carefully chosen tones were what Anne would have called "*larmoyant*" and so lugubrious that real tears and a handkerchief should have rounded every period. Was he not chief mourner at the death and burial of a twenty years' marriage?

"If it be adjudged that the Queen is my lawful wife nothing will be more pleasant and acceptable to me, both for the clearing of my conscience and the good qualities that I know in her. For I assure you all that besides her noble parentage she is a woman of most gentleness, humility, and submission, and of all good qualities belonging to nobility she is above suspicion. So that if I were to marry again I would choose her above all women. But if it is determined in judgment that our marriage is against God's law, then shall I sorrow at parting from so good a lady and loving companion. These be the sores that vex my mind! These be the pangs that trouble my conscience! for the declaration of which I have assembled you together, and now you may depart."

His conscience! thought Wolsey, without any remembrance of his own. But Henry's radiated such supernatural light at this time that it dazzled others into a very natural oblivion of their private shortcomings. And it is

not too much to say that butcher's son as Wolsey might be, the allusions of the King to Katharine were more revolting to him in their coarse calculated flattery than even in their hypocrisy. Did the fool believe he could take the world in like that? But he abased his head over a bunch of papers in his hand and endured.

The second scene that preoccupied him differed altogether from the first. It had been necessary that he and Campeggio should pay a formal visit to Katharine, and he dreaded it for more reasons than one. He knew the impression of uncomplaining dignity which she must make on the man from the Vatican and how detrimental it would be to Henry's interest. The great Catholic princess, the loyal wife and mother, had no part to play. She would be simply herself and entirely sincere. Men respond perforce to the call of sincerity. It vanquishes charm and loveliness when grave matters are afoot and has the higher beauty to which the knees of the heart are bowed.

They went to the Bridewell Palace and desired to see her and presently were introduced. She rose to receive them with all the courtesy due to princes of the Church, and Wolsey saw Campeggio's eyes fix upon her.

She wore a sweeping gown of plain black velvet with enormous sleeves lined with ermine and a stiff French hood edged with pearls, and her face in the midst of all this clear black and white had the sallow hue of old ivory, with lines of pain about the mouth and heavy-lidded eyes. Not beautiful as beauty is reckoned by those who look skin-deep and no further, but with the most touching beauty of courage and dying hope and patient endurance that man could see. It moved even Wolsey with an irritation which he called impatience to himself, but knew was shame—though he was on guard again, seeing Campeggio's dry-as-dust ecclesiastical face soften as he bowed more deeply than was needful. She stood to hear the cause of their errand, and Wolsey must take the lead and announce the Court of Inquiry. She relaxed then into her great chair and answered sighing:

"Alas, my lords, is it a question whether I am the King's lawful wife or no when I have been married to him almost twenty years and no objection made? Many prelates and lords, privy councillors of the King, are yet alive who then adjudged our marriage good and lawful, and now to say it is detestable is a great marvel to me, especially when I consider what a wise prince the King's father was and also the affection my father King Ferdinand had for me."

She stopped, her voice shaken with natural emotion, and Campeggio interjected politely that all—including the King himself—hoped that the

inquiry would maintain those opinions. She listened and shook her head, saying more coldly than she had begun:

“It may be so, but I think neither of our fathers was so unwise that he did not foresee what might follow our marriage. The King my father sent to the Court of Rome and there obtained a dispensation that I, being the one brother’s wife might without scruple of conscience marry the other brother lawfully, which licence under seal I have. And this makes me say and believe, as my first marriage was never completed, that my second is good and lawful.”

She paused again, looking at them with expectant eyes as if hoping for some note of agreement in a position which she thought unshakable. There was a dead uncomfortable silence, Wolsey looking down and Campeggio fingering the tassels which secured his cape. Suddenly some flash of thought or insight broke her calm, and swinging round in her chair she confronted Wolsey full-face.

“But for this trouble I may thank you, my lord—you!—and it was because I always wondered at your pride and vainglory and abhorred your voluptuous life and little valued your presumption and tyranny. You kindled this fire maliciously, especially from your grudge to my nephew the Emperor whom you hate worse than a scorpion because he would not make you Pope by force. Therefore you have said more than once that you would make trouble for him, and you have kept true promise. For all his wars and vexations he may thank you alone! As for me—what trouble you have put me to by this new-found doubt, God knows, to whom I commit myself.”

There was some injustice as well as cruel justice in the words, and it was wormwood to Wolsey that Campeggio, sitting by with secret eyes, should hear either. Wormwood!—and yet he could not hate her, nor could he retort that next to herself he had suffered more from this matter than any other. He made some muffled protest and turned a winking eye on Campeggio that asked, “What can you expect?”

A pause. They suggested obsequiously that to her deeply religious spirit a conventual life would be congenial and would solve all the problems. She smiled coolly. What—a mother and leave her daughter unprotected to face so cruel a world? A little more was said, but they saw it was useless, and then in a moment she had swerved with the perfect breeding of a born and practised hostess to some subject wholly uncontroversial, and in a few moments more they were leaving and Campeggio had said, “Poor lady!” without any embarrassing references, and so they parted.

But Wolsey went bitterly away. He and she had been good friends in the olden days when it was worth while to be the friend of the Queen Regent who while Henry was in France had driven the Scots before the English bows and swords on the field of Flodden and shown herself in every way an approved and worthy princess. But her eyes on his life had been too searching, and they had long since drifted apart. There was no future to which he could now look forward, and it beat about his head like the wings of ill-omened ravens that in her ruin he had helped to contrive his own. Could it be that after all there is such a thing as the judgment of the Unseen? That question he could not answer to himself. And now the lists were set. The day had come.

The Legates' Court of Inquiry was held in the old and magnificent Palace of Blackfriars in London. It was fitted out as a solemn court of justice. At the end of the hall were a table and two chairs covered with cloth of gold for Wolsey and Campeggio. Campeggio entered at his ease and marching nimbly for his years, a secret-eyed old man with a masking smile of benignant, his shapeless body draped sack-like in the cardinals' red, and a sharp sideways glance at the waiting crowd through which he and Wolsey had a way cleared for them by officious ushers. But Wolsey dragged more than a little. He looked noticeably older and harassed. The people remarked it but without pity.

Indeed he was ill in soul and body. He had alternate moments of panic and listlessness as bodily spasms of fever and semi-exhaustion succeeded one another, and still, after the fashion of the times, he numbed or stimulated them with strong meats or drinks and so held them at bay awhile.

Now he looked with ironic melancholy at the two canopies with rich chairs beneath them which stood right and left of the Court, the King's raised and higher and padded with cushions of gold tissue. That one he knew would be empty today. Katharine's would be filled. She had much to fear but nothing to hide, and he knew she would face alike the crowd and the Cardinals. He and Campeggio took their seats, and foregone formalities began, and Wolsey fingered his papers and let his mind sink into memory while they waited for her arrival.

He sat staring at the table, recalling those two scenes and all that lay behind them with the deep furrow of abstraction between his brows. Too late—too late! And if Henry——

A cry outside—hoarse, multitudinous—"The Queen—the Queen!" He sprang alive, dismissing memory. Campeggio leaned and whispered to him as it swelled louder, louder, into a roar of applause that battered at the

windows and made the old hall roar responsive. Campeggio stared at the door, startled.

“The Queen! The Queen! God bless your Majesty! God send you a good deliverance!” A tempest of sound,—the London prentices leading whose forerunners her mercy had once saved from death. They were fearless. Singly they might have feared, though it is hard to stop an Englishman’s mouth, but not even the angriest of Tudors can execute a mob, and they took their chance wholeheartedly. They roared, “Down with Nan Bullen. No Nan Bullen for our queen!”—and Wolsey’s heart echoed it. The secret was out with a vengeance, and they blistered her name with execration as the Queen passed through them bowing gravely, her ladies closing about her.

The door was thrown open, her usher preceded her, and trailing folds of black velvet she came up the hall with the dignity of those trained to move in great palace spaces under a fusillade of eyes,—all rising as she entered.

Four bishops attended her and a great procession of ladies and formed about her a magnificent group as she took her seat. For a moment she sat searching the hall with her eyes, glanced at the King’s empty chair, and then, rising, made a deep reverence to the legates and addressed them calmly.

“My Lords Legate, in this land you are prejudiced and incompetent judges, both holding as you do benefices from the King. I do not recognize you. I appeal my case to the Holy Father and the Court of Rome.”

No more. And with another deep reverence she left her chair, her ladies going behind her and the news of her courage speeding before her to rouse fresh applause, and so left the legates dumb.

With the strange instinct of the people the crowd outside saw in her the representative wife ousted by the representative harlot, and the women especially wept and prayed and struggled to touch her robe as if in her were exalted all their own wrongs and hoped-for victories. They knew also—for these things fled over England and were discussed in village churchyards as the people poured out from mass, how queenly she had borne herself with Nan Bullen. No abuse had sullied Katharine’s lips. She had not proclaimed her wrongs abroad. Silence and misconstruction had been her portion. But when the right moment came she could strike lion-like, and neither King nor harlot daunt her! And Wolsey sitting within heard it and could not condemn it,—rather, with a secret joy, he gladdened that Anne should be made to smart and Henry through her.

She did smart. Wyatt coming down to Allington rode, over to Hever and found her in the midst of her revellers with Mark Smeaton at their head. The man had a genius for teaching the indolent minded to amuse themselves by

rounding them up into the endless frolics which stimulated them by sailing a little nearer the wind than custom permitted.

Wyatt found them in the bubble of rehearsal for a masque to be called "The Judgment of Paris," the handsome Francis Weston to personate Paris in a white gold-bordered tunic singularly airy about the legs for popular taste in view of the elaborate masculine decoration of the times, and to present the golden apple to Anne as Venus,—a part unsuited to her French glitter and sophisticated graces in spite of a freedom about the arms and bosom which Wyatt noted with mingled feelings considering the news he was perhaps not wholly displeased to bring.

At first he could hardly secure her attention—she was running to and fro in the great hall at Hever pulling, pushing, commanding the duller men and women into shape, and Smeaton seconding her with careless familiarity to one and all. "Here, Anne"—"There, Anne!" for ever on his lips. Wyatt stood a moment regardant. In fancy he saw the crowd about the Blackfriars breaking in among this gay rabble with their war-cry. "We will not have Nan Bullen!—No!—No Nan Bullen for us. The Queen! The Queen!"

Presently he caught her eye and beckoned, and somewhat startled yet with the coquette's gleam in her sidelong eyes she came at once, and they went into the little sweet room of the King.

Forgiveness?—Was that his errand? She wondered. Well, then she would be tyrannical but finally graciously forgiving. She sat looking up and smiling ambiguously with small mocking mouth and her strange restless gaze, evidently expecting incense one way or another.

It did not come. He began by saying she had decided very wisely in coming to Hever during these matters. Feeling ran very high in London. Her gaze stiffened.

"If the people are insolent the King will know how to punish it."

Wyatt said, "Doubtless," with a touch of cynicism. "But even his Majesty would find it difficult to send half London to the Tower."

He got in his story there and saw the angry blood in her cheeks and her little fists clench.

"What! And you all stood by and saw it! What are poles for if not to hang the ringleaders?"

"Again the difficulty of not having poles enough to go round," Wyatt answered coolly. "Every man was a ringleader and more. I think, Anne, had you been in London Suffolk House would have been in some danger."

"Did they name me—the rabble? If they did——"

He told her briefly but without softening details. The quicksilver of her spirit flashed up the thermometer to fever. She stamped her little foot. She would tell the King, she would——

“Be sure he will not need telling,” said Wyatt. “Every man who values his loyalty will tell it. Such tempests need as much consideration as a storm at sea.”

She broke again into threats. Men knew how to deal with such *canaille*. In France they would——

Wyatt said coolly that the case was different with Englishmen, and Anne retorted that axe and stake would bring an Englishman to reason as well as another. She would bend the King to——

“Perhaps one reason why they value the Queen is that she has bent the King to mercy,” Wyatt said reflectively. “They think a woman’s office about the King lies that way. But it is not my business. I did but think you should know.”

She thanked him then with intention.

“And have you nothing to say for yourself, True Thomas?—you who nearly did me the most dreadful damage! I did not think it of my friend! And it was a trick unfair as perilous.”

That halted him a moment.

“That it was unfair I own. But what have you deserved? As I drew out the tablet I thought—‘Dear heart, how like you this—’ and only wished you had been there to answer. I would have more gladly done it before your eyes.”

She pouted and said, extending a pleading hand:

“Cruel! Cruel!”

He answered:

“You need your lesson and I knew well that a word from you would put all straight with the King. But will it always, Anne? When you fade a little as the Queen is faded,—when he knows all your tricks and graces by heart and craves for a different sauce to his meat—will it then? There may be a refuge for you then even in the liking of the *canaille*. I saw the Queen’s lip twitch——”

Anne put up hers.

“O, anything against the King and me! I know the jealous lover. Well—come and play with us awhile, True Thomas! You grow too grave.”

He had risen and stood leaning against the side of the window.

“I thank you, but not while Smeaton leads the revels. I think that man a dangerous friend. As the leader of a band of musicians he passes,—with a rope to divide him from the gentlefolk. As one of them he is—but what good? I have warned you before, Anne, and you take your way. I wish it were not a lewd fellow like Mark. To tell him your mind is madness. But—farewell!”

He resisted all offers of refreshment—all temptations however lavishly displayed, and rode off with hanging bridle, thinking deeply. She flew back angrily to her guests and spread his tale everywhere, raging at Wolsey, who might have stopped it all and did not. Naturally her words flew right and left and were tinder to gunpowder. Henry, who had often cautioned her before, wrote again when they reached him, still utterly subservient to her whims but sounding the very alarm Wyatt had done:

DARLING,

I heartily commend me to you, acquainting you that I am a little perplexed. In my last letters I wrote to you that I trusted shortly to see you. This is better known in London than anything that is about me, and I marvel at this, but want of discreet secrecy must be the reason. No more to you now but I trust our meeting shall soon not depend upon other men’s handling but upon our own. Written by the hand of him that longs to be yours.

She traced this and any other rebuke however gentle to the influence of Wolsey and literally, like Salome, would have had his head if she had dared to ask it. Daily she paved the way with hints and insinuations, daily the incessant drop of water a little hollowed the stone, but not yet—not yet. For the present the King’s hopes centred in him.

Great times dawned in London with that May of 1529. Solemnly as had not been done hitherto in spite of the legates’ sittings the King and Queen were personally cited before the legantine court on the 18th of June. All the world was to behold the obedience of even sovereign princes to the mandates of Rome! England thrilled to it. Europe leaned and listened.

A court crowded by those who had permission to be present. Outside, the crowd who could not be restrained, and already the Tudors were beginning to realize that it is not well to attempt it. The King and Queen with their different attendants passed through the lane of gazing eager faces;—eyes surrounded, blessed, besought, threatened them, and still they went, and the great doors were thrown open and the battle set.

He sat under his canopy; she in her golden chair, a little bowed, patient like a woman who, suffering, conserves her final effort for the issues of life and death.

The crier bellowed in a voice which reached the watchers outside:

“Henry King of England, come into court,” and the King cried, “Here!”—loud, manly, and royally assertive, and then instantly addressed himself to repeating the sentences of his former declaration. The best of wives—the most fitted to content his heart and so forth. The Queen raised her hand to her face and the great sleeve hid what emotion none can tell.

Men cannot easily be deceived by words and not a man there but knew the truth. Rows of grave anxious faces but under them the flittering thoughts produced by knowledge. “The most fitted to content his heart”—Aha, but what about dark eyes and lips provocative and amorous delays and the sweets of stolen caresses? The beast that sleeps in every man awakened at the thought and licked its lips and sprang amorously upon the thought of Nan Bullen and her caresses. Natural enough and especially in a king, but a spendthriftiness of trouble and public attention! He should be content with an easier way. Nan Bullen was worth less than a crown in the market any day!

Again the crier’s voice:

“Katharine Queen of England, come into court!”—and all looks were fastened upon her.

She rose and repeated her protest against the court as an unjust and partial one and again made her appeal to Rome, basing her objection on the ground that both the judges held benefices from her opposer in the suit. True enough, since all knew that not only Wolsey held many but that Campeggio also held the English bishopric of Hereford.

Henry’s face stiffened—that she should dare! But he knew he himself had invoked the Cæsar of Rome and opened the way for her.

The Cardinals rose, and Wolsey with Campeggio’s assent denied her the right of appeal to Rome. She remained seated and silent. Again the crier’s voice summoned her into court and then followed a strange and heart-piercing scene—a royal woman’s heart stripped before the people.

She rose to her full height, the folds of her velvet dress patterned with great gold roses falling majestically about her, and so descended from her chair. Instinctively her ladies grouped about her, and ignoring the judges she stood a second and crossed herself as one summoning spiritual aid and so swept across the court to Henry, followed by her ladies, and knelt down before him while all men saw the fear and amazement in his face. To him,

lifting her hands, she spoke as though they were alone in the wide world and only God to hear—and the spirits of their dead children.

“Sir, I beseech you, for all the loves there have been between us and for the love of God, let me have some right and justice. Take some pity and compassion upon me, for I am a poor stranger born out of your dominions. I have here no unprejudiced counsellor, and I flee to you as to the head of justice within your realm. Alas!—wherein have I offended you? I take God and all the world to witness that I have been to you a true humble and obedient wife ever conformable to your will and pleasure. This twenty years have I been your wife, and by me you have had divers children, although it pleased God to call them out of the world. I put it to your conscience whether I came not to you a maid. If you have found any dishonour in my conduct then I am content to depart. You cause me to stand in judgment of this new court wherein you do me much wrong if you intend any kind of cruelty, since your subjects cannot be impartial counsellors for me as they dare not, for fear of you, disobey your will. Therefore most humbly do I require of you in charity and for the love of God who is the just Judge of all to spare me the sentence of this new court until I am notified what way my friends in Spain may advise me to take, and if you will not extend this favour to me your pleasure be fulfilled and I commit my cause to God.”

No answer. He sat stiffly staring not at her but at the wall. She rose with the tears running down her face and, making a deep obeisance to the King, led the way out of court followed by her ladies. That departure had an inexpressible majesty that struck upon every heart present.

All watched breathless as the crier shouted till the walls echoed:

“Katharine Queen of England, come into court!” And Griffiths who led her hesitated. She threw her head up gloriously:

“I hear it well enough, but on!—go you on, for this is no court wherein I can have justice.”

She had come and gone and something in her presence and going had turned the proceedings into a poor travesty of truth and honour. Dangerously angry at the effect of her appeal, Henry was on his feet in a moment to try to recover the situation—his conscience, the Queen’s virtues,—the palpable effort to appear chivalrous and disinterested—Wolsey wondered if all that stuff had the flat ring of base metal to others that it had to him. Yet so oddly mixed is human nature that her triumph, for it was no less, angered him too. But he listened with attention when at his own request the King declared Wolsey had been no instigator of his doubts, but that the admonitions of his

confessor were the first cause. Now all the bishops had signed the licence for enquiry and——

Up sprang Bishop Fisher of Rochester. He had never signed it! Warham of Canterbury asserted that he had. Fisher declared his signature a forgery,—and in the confusion of this dispute Henry dissolved the court. Only one certainty had come out of it—Fisher was a marked man.

The Queen was certainly a marked woman. Not knowing how else to strike, Henry informed his council that a design to kill himself and Wolsey had been discovered. “In which,” said the council, “if it could be proved that the Queen had any hand she could not expect to be spared.” Malice itself halted before that suggestion but none the less as the council “in their consciences thought the King’s life to be in danger,” they advised him to separate from the Queen at bed and board and to take the Princess Mary from her. Surely she could not endure all these disgraces and agonies! Surely they could drive her to shelter in a convent! And Wolsey annotated this precious paper in his own hand to the effect that the Queen was a fool to resist the King’s will, that her offspring had not received the blessing of heaven and that her abstract of the Pope’s original dispensation for her marriage with Henry was a forgery. A worthless woman indeed! Katharine sighed and held on her way.

They summoned her again before the court on 25th of June. She refused to appear, and they declared her contumacious. She handed in her appeal to the Pope by her proctor, and what was more efficacious, wrote to her nephew the Emperor Charles declaring that death would be more welcome to her than any step impugning her marriage and the Princess Mary’s legitimacy. And before those two actions of hers the legates halted, bewildered.

Wrought upon by his own and Anne’s nervous rages of impatience, spurred by the hatred and distrust of Wolsey which she hid no longer from the King, Henry commanded Wolsey to a private meeting.

Trembling, Wolsey came. Anne unnerved him. She had opportunities with the King that he could not have, and he knew she used every one to distil venom against him into the King’s ear. What she said—where she struck he could not know. He could but feel that she was deadly. And yet he dared not complain.

“Sir, sir, we do our best!” he protested. “Rome moves slowly but surely. And the Emperor Charles——”

But Henry fell into an obscene rage of insult and vilification. He uttered terrible imprecations against his wife and daughter. Every tie of love and

duty, patriotism and friendship, was swept away in the wild torrent of sexual desire and the strange madness Anne had inspired, and Wolsey saw the man's nature naked and unashamed before him,—mere savage, lower than any savage because a man's brain had voluntarily abdicated all human teaching.

Returning ghastly to his barge at Blackfriars stairs—"Doom—doom!" the word tolled in his ears. Daily the horror and peril of "the King's matter" grew. Daily more and more were drawn within its greedy tentacles. Fisher was doomed, he knew. Thomas More would follow and he himself. This woman would feed on blood like a vampire. The harlot stronger than Rome, stronger than all else in a world ruled by lust! He saw her through mists of terror—a figure apocalyptic and dreadful, the sum of all men's lust through all the ages—drunken with the wine-cup in her hand, her rose-white body fed by his own brutish passions and those of all men. Insatiable, immortal. It was as though she dawned upon him in a vision of hell.

As he stumbled into the boat the Bishop of Carlisle fanning himself gently with his sleeve observed that it was a warm day.

"Warm!" Wolsey groaned. "If you had been chafed as I have you would say it was hot."

He had his foretaste of judgment. He tried to snatch a brief rest for his exhausted body but they roused him mercilessly. He must see the Queen with Campeggio early that morning. It was Anne's father who had summoned him—now the Earl of Wiltshire—and Wolsey glared at the terrified man.

"You—you—!!" he stuttered and Thomas Boleyn slunk back into the curtains. He could not estimate Wolsey's weakness with the accuracy of Anne, and his spirit sank within him. The tears of panic rose in his eyes under that fixed glare. They say he wept. But presently Wolsey collapsed into himself and waved him off.

Anne at Hever was raging also—reproaching the King with weakness, listlessness.

"The devils are on us, and she, the great devil of all! Pride is her God, not Christ or you. O mine—mine!—do you desert me? Stay with me this night, or I shall go mad with grief and shame. They trample me in the dirt for all Europe to see, and I have no refuge but my love."

Henry held her close to him passionately. His whole being rose to meet the slight body strained in his embrace.

"Love—love! what will content you?"

“His head, my heart. He ruins us—he is plotting with the Queen and Rome. And all I want is you—only and ever—you! Let me be all yours now—body, heart, and soul. What do name and fame matter? You—to be mine—mine.”

She knew the moment had come. The very possibility of a child would stir him to frantic action. It had come. That night, in a chamber guarded by Simonette, the King slept in the arms of Anne Boleyn.

Chapter Fifteen

THE legates went to Katharine early in the morning, Campeggio hopeful of accommodation. After all, what is a mere woman against men's reasoning? Wolsey said little, darkly assured of the result. He knew her! Nor did he say a word while they waited in the presence-chamber of Bridewell Palace among a few lords and ladies in waiting, but stood looking moodily from the window, brooding on the thronging troubles. Henry's sister Margaret Queen of Scotland had for years furnished the world with a disgraceful spectacle in her licentious life, her marriages, divorces, and entanglements. He could hear Europe's open laughter over "birds of a feather" as Henry's matrimonial troubles loomed larger in the light of day. That very morning had come letters—— He spat out of the window as much on the nature of things as to clear his throat. Campeggio sat, ostentatiously passing his beads through his fingers. Presently the door opened and unannounced and alone the Queen came in, softly closing it behind her. There was a skein of red embroidery silk about her neck, and holding it up and smiling after she had made her reverence she said:

"My lords, you see my employment. In this way I pass my time with my maids who are none of the ablest counsellors.—Yet I have no other in England and Spain is far off."

Wolsey bowed deeply.

"If it please your Grace to go into your privy chamber we will show you the cause of our coming."

She smiled faintly.

"My lord, if you have anything to say speak it openly before these folk, for nothing can be said against me that all the world may not hear."

Baffled, Wolsey tried Latin:

"Domina serenissima——"

She cut him short:

"Pray, my good lord, speak English. For, thank God, though I know some Latin, I speak and understand English."

What could he do? Grudgingly at first, then warming to his work, he made her great offers before those listening ears and watching eyes. She should have what she chose of riches and honours. Subject to the first right of the children of a second marriage Princess Mary should be successor to the Crown. And what a simple matter! Queen Katharine had but to consent to the divorce and then—and then—— He flowed on smoothly, warmed into a glow by his own eloquence, Campeggio listening frostily. Did she hesitate? Was there hope? Who could tell? Looking down, she listened. Wolsey paused. Presently she answered:

“My lord, I thank you for your good will, but I cannot answer you suddenly. I sat among my maids not dreaming of your visit, and I need much counsel.”

There was a pause, all standing by listening with open eyes and ears.—What had she in mind? What?

She lifted her head and looked Wolsey in the eyes:

“My lords, I am but a woman; what knowledge have I to answer men of such wisdom as you? I pray that you will be good to me.—Destitute as I am of counsel in a foreign land I entreat your counsel.”

The strangest scene! It is recorded by Cavendish, a man who stood among the listening groups. Was it the deepest policy, or could any but Katharine have so flung herself in single-hearted honesty upon her enemies, the men whom Henry had armed to destroy her? What did she see in them—what compelling power rose in herself to bend them to her service? Certainly she knew what she did, as the issue proves. For Wolsey, looking steadfastly at her, a second time demanded a private interview, and Campeggio making assent she led the way to her withdrawing room, and the door was closed upon their conference.

“And they remained there some time in earnest conversation, and what passed none knew, but accommodation of the dispute was as far off as ever,” says Cavendish.

None knew—yes, but now that the mists of time have lifted one cannot guess wrong, for the issue stands clear.

Wolsey and Campeggio left her, side by side. Wolsey with his eyes fixed on some distant hope above and beyond his own thinking. Campeggio sternly silent with his eyes on the ground, both at first forgetting to acknowledge the salutations of the people. But before they parted Wolsey turned to Campeggio and quoted a certain verse of scripture, as thus:

“Who is on my side, who?”

And Campeggio responded from the same source:

“Throw down the cursed woman. And they threw her down from the window.”

At the moment no more was said, but both men understood.

When the sittings of the Court of the Legates was resumed in Henry’s presence Katharine refused to appear, and the counsel for the King eagerly pressed them to give judgment against her and for the divorce then and there. They believed they had her now. But Campeggio rose.

“It cannot be. This matter is beyond us. To his Holiness the Pope we refer it.”

Katharine had triumphed. The men who had rejected her appeal to Rome now themselves referred her cause to the Pope. What had happened? A thunderbolt had fallen on Henry and Anne.

Henry sprang to his feet and strode out. The court dissolved in panic and confusion.

The Duke of Suffolk—Henry’s brother-in-law and partisan, widower of the Queen-Duchess Mary—struck his hand ferociously on the table.

“By God’s Body, I swear it was never good in England since Cardinals came there!”

Wolsey—the Wolsey of old, strong to subdue, looked up smiling bitterly.

“My lord of Suffolk, had it not been for one cardinal at least—my poor self—you had lost your head and with it the tongue to revile cardinals.”

So they separated, and the news flew broad and wide over England and with rejoicing.

“The Cardinals are on the Queen’s side. And Rome. They aid her. She has conquered.”

So they talked and hoped while Henry went down to Hever to soothe the almost maddened Anne. And now she had given herself and in vain, she cried! He could not soothe her. She sobbed wildly in his arms.

“And if I now bear a child it is doomed to bastardy. You will see your son an outcast. What have I told you? Did I not swear that Wolsey was a traitor?—vile, treacherous, fawning and stabbing us in the back with a cringe and a smile. O my heart’s heart, mine!—Why wait on Rome? Marry me, make me yours and let them do their foul worst! What can they do to a free king?”

Death-pale, tears streaming from her eyes, she looked up at him.

“A king and cannot help me!” she wept, and at last, exhausted, lay in his arms, pale, her light extinguished, dark lashes sealed upon the wanness of her cheeks. Almost maddened himself he swore that Wolsey or any other who dared to cross their path should die, were it the Queen herself. His own position was sheer bewilderment. Marry her he dared not in the face of Rome, leave her he could not. At any moment she might announce that in her body she carried the one hope and passion greater in him than his passion for herself. But he was powerless.

In the face of the Cardinals’ pronouncement and the growing wrath and joy of the people he must act. His summer progress in the shires was due. Anne he would not forsake—Katharine he must not. To Anne’s secret fury he compromised. Katharine must be shown to the people beside him. Until Rome spoke she was Queen. But Anne—now unspeakably precious and the more so because he feared that in her agonies she might do something desperate to break his hopes—Anne must come with them. He would not lose sight of his treasure,—no, not for an hour.

The people stared and murmured.

“Nan Bullen beside the Queen! Surely no decent man would fling his harlot in his wife’s face. Men are not women—too much must not be asked, but yet there is a decency!”

Anne carried herself in proud silence except to Henry—alternating with fits of reckless merriment.

“For if I were to weep my eyes out—and I could!—the Queen would triumph. If I fell now she would hold her place until she dies!” she said to Simonette. “I will live—live! Make me beautiful to hold him, and pray—pray that I may have no child until the end is in sight. And yet—if it were so—God knows!”

Indeed she was beautiful in those days of feverish brilliance. Katharine, observing her calmly, knowing her perilous hatred, owned it to herself, and, wisely tolerant of what she despised, could have endured all but the stigma of the divorce for Princess Mary and herself. There she never wavered. For the moment silence had fallen between herself and Henry on the subject. Both were talked out—extinct volcanoes, and Henry might even have lapsed apathetically into the position of the man with a first wife and a secondary one but for Anne’s ruthless determination. As the Queen had said to her—she would have all or nothing. Nothing it could not be. Then it must be all.

But she and the family junta through which she spread her political tentacles were near desperation with terror of what pronouncement the Pope might issue when Campeggio reached Rome. He had left taking a more than willing farewell of Henry, civilities on the surface but bitter enmity beneath. And, to disprove the statements laid before Rome of Anne's innocent relations with Henry, her noble chastity and other virtues, Campeggio's spies had actually stolen Henry's love-letters from her cabinet at Suffolk House, and they were speeding ahead of him by trusty couriers to the Vatican, where they repose to this day. There would be little talk of her chastity when these and the stories which had reached Campeggio in England returned with him to Rome! Henry's agents were a day after the fair when they searched the legate's baggage at Dover and uselessly increased the Papal bitterness. The opinions expressed there of Henry and his sister of Scotland (who was even now invoking a divorce for herself from the Pope's mercy) baffle description.

Simonette counselled Anne's return to London during this breathless pause.

"You are making yourself a show beside the Queen and playing her game for her!" she told Anne. "Get back to London. Let him seek you, and let all the world know he does it. Do not skulk, but do not flaunt before the Queen."

For a week Anne fought Simonette. She would not yield an inch. How could she? She was vindictive and terrified in turn.

"The Queen has been his wife for more than twenty years, and she will burrow her way into his habits again, and I shall be the mistress and have no hold on him. The wife is always the stronger. O, may all the devils catch Wolsey and drag him down to hell—if he is not too bad for even their company!"

Simonette smiled. She had hardened into the habit of telling few of her thoughts to Anne these days and counselling little but weightily. She often thought Anne a fool;—Smeaton and all that folly with him and his like roused her deep but now silent contempt. A magnificent hand of cards but a player capable of mad revokes—that was how she saw the most dreaded woman in Europe.

But at last Anne returned to London from Greenwich. A mob following her and shouting—"No Nan Bullen for us! We want no —— to rule us," was the only argument she would heed, and she had it. She ran to the King, pale as ashes, and got no satisfaction. What was he to do with a rabble of women? No, his darling must bear it. Her day would come. So she reached

London half mad with nervous storms and panics, Henry following her with all speed. She called her father and the Duke of Norfolk into council as to the next stratagem, Wolsey having turned traitor and Rome blowing fire in their faces. Obviously Wolsey's destruction, she gasped hysterically. They were not safe for a day with him, and in his place must plant some docile creature of their own to weight the scales. Henry, so long evading that issue, was now yielding. Yes, his old servant had proved a lath painted to look like iron, if no worse. He had hoped that with Campeggio out of the picture Wolsey would "have the guts," for so the King worded it, to pronounce the divorce himself. But no—"the trembling hound" declared he had no power to do this simple thing and so to defy Rome. Was there no strong man in England?

Yes, the Boleyns had the right man, a new man, a priest, mild-mannered but obstinate, who feared neither Rome nor Emperor. A man in tune with the times, in sympathy with the new learning, but without the idealism of its leaders such as More and Erasmus. A thoughtful calm man to work with—the supplest tool! Would the King see him? Would he not, and joyously! Into her father's house this Cranmer, who had been tutoring obscurely in the country, was immediately taken and there Henry met him and (a little dubious as to all these merits) probed the man with one sharp thrusting question to lead off with.

"Supposing Rome deceives me and I am conquered? Where can I turn?"

And Cranmer, bending reflective brows upon it, replied slowly:

"Sir, my liege, Rome does not exhaust all the possibilities. Outside Rome is a greater thing—Europe. Were I your Grace's advisers I would say this: Failing Rome, apply for the opinion of the most learned universities in Europe on the validity of a marriage so contracted. You will then receive the opinions of jurists and scholars as well as those of Churchmen. Great they are, but—outside them lie also things many and great, as Luther and other men of mark can testify."

Anne clapped her jewelled hands; Henry smote his great fist on his knee:

"He has gotten the sow by the right ear!"

A whole new vista of possibilities was opened before them to be held deadly secret until Rome should have spoken. It may be that Cranmer foresaw, but Henry certainly did not, where this new guide would lead him. He was leashed however to their service and kept behind the scenes for the moment even with Anne's approval. With her, Wolsey's destruction was the thing nearest and dearest to her heart. Like a huntress she wound her horn to sound the *mort* of the tall stag labouring on his last mile with the hounds

straining to fix their teeth in his vitals. Those hounds were her father, Norfolk, Suffolk, and Percy her one-time lover—now Earl of Northumberland. Not one of them but had his own personal hatred to satisfy, and as for Anne herself “the old malice” was never forgotten night or day even in the crowding new ones.

He was an old man now, worn out with disappointments, a mere battlefield of the emotions, but that awakened no pity, and they were the keener on his track because they suspected Henry of the possibility of relenting. Only in patches and sullenly, but sufficiently to save Wolsey’s face. And that they could not endure.

Anne summoned the Four one night to meet her. George was present, soon to be an ambassador and sobering daily as the immensity of the struggle forced itself upon his vision. How gaily he and Anne had entered upon it! How natural it had been to take that primrose path between flowering hedges leading so deliciously to the blue hills of ambition with the King for guide—the good fellow and jolly comrade, the love-bound slave of their quicker more passionate natures. And how it had succeeded! They were climbing the highest mountain now where the rays of the English Crown gilded the peak, and the King more bound to them than ever. Their father was an earl and on the Council, he himself Lord Rochford; even Mary the despised was basking in the pale sunshine of lesser Court appointments.

And Anne—Anne,—on her the eyes of the world were fixed. She was shortly to be created a peeress in her own right—the first, they said, in England, and for her, if Rome could be but tamed or evaded the Crown shone near. And yet, thought George with his old irony, how strangely different the practical taste of the thing was from the contemplation of it! So many zests had mingled to create that adventure, and now there was but one—the zest of ambition of conquering, and his Epicurean spirit found that harsh and unalluring, though an instinct mingled with it and spurred it—the instinct of self-salvation. He knew they must win or die now, for they were being thrust down the unwilling throat of England as a nauseous draught, and if she should have the strength to vomit them forth—he knew!

And Henry had changed and that change, though George was acutely conscious of it, he found hard to analyze. Sensually he was more in love than ever, and not only sensually, but Anne had become a habit. He could do nothing without her. Even in European politics she must share, and gifted with the quick diplomatic brain possessed by many brilliant women added to her French training her intuition was really valuable to him provided he did not lean on her biased judgment. As for amusement—all that he had flowed

through her, and he sat by the source and filled his cup and drank when he was thirsty. He looked at, needed no other woman, and this absorption was the more marked since she had become practically his wife. But even there—George, skilled in the minds of men, himself a flower of the Renaissance, fastidious in the emotion of love, scented danger that he could not place. Was it summed up in his own phrase—“Anne had become a habit”? And must every habit pall on the flesh? Is it only the intellect and spirit that can transmute habit into higher ecstasies on the ascending planes? If so—? But Henry was not by any means ascending. They had thought—George and Anne—that they could sweep him with them into an earthly Paradise of beauty of life,—the unchaining, true!—but also the taming of all the passions into fascinating forms of decorative beauty and wit—exquisite romances set in banquetting halls and Italianate marble-terraced gardens and the harmonies of lutes, and fair garlanded heads bowed to listen to amorous tales—a world a-moral and lovely beyond a poet’s dream. The setting was here in England if their skilful hands could mould it. But Henry? All unwitting they had lured him into a fight for life where the shambles were the last court of appeal, and he had grown sinister, choleric. No courts of love for him! And Anne had descended into the arena also and after the manner of St. Paul—whom she did not otherwise resemble—was fighting for her life with beasts at Ephesus. Life horribly lacked loveliness.

George found daily change in Anne. There were days when it touched even her charm, for beauty is harmony, and all her nature was discord now. She was growing fierce, eager, sallow, with fear and care. He had warned her that hate is no diet for beauty, and she had stared a moment and hurried off in a savage denunciation of Wolsey. And now the family junta had met to decree his extinction. Was it worth while? George wondered, staring at the velvet that carpeted Anne’s floors. No—not worth while! It would add no single joy to life. It was another bleak necessity. There were now so many!

They sat about the table. Anne adverse and frowning as she told them how Henry had ventured some civility to Wolsey the day before and it had taken all her skill to manœuvre him out for a long riding picnic with herself and her (now) unofficial revellers until Wolsey should have gone away hanging his head and without opportunity for another word. As du Bellai the French Ambassador was writing to his Government with perfect truth:

The worst of the evil is that Mademoiselle de Boulain has made her friend promise that he will never hear him [Wolsey] speak, for she well thinks he cannot help having pity upon him.

“He spoke to him alone,” she told them acidly, “and it was all I could do to get him away next day with the Enemy waiting about, watching with eyes like a dying dog’s to seize the King going or coming. But I was too cunning for him. I tell you one and all that there is a secret liking for him in the King’s heart deep down, and fight it as I will it is there, and I tell you again that unless we can wrest the seals and his office from him he will do us a damage yet. Now—what is there to say? Minutes are precious as rubies.”

George looked at her reflectively. Yes—such emotions are not cosmetics. Her eyes were no longer dewy. Hard and bright as a parrot’s, they glittered in an ivory face which promised to be angular before many years were past. He put in his word as much for Anne as the Enemy,—it seemed to him that if Anne could plot her life so that she could afford to be disinterested it might pay better with Henry and all else in the long run. Beauty should guard her mystic secrets, but now she had no reticences; every emotion was tattered before the King and her confidants and more. He said with his usual nonchalance:

“The man is our enemy. We cannot trust him. But I have it from a sure hand that he is all but mortally sick. My counsel is—Wait. Have a little patience and death will free us. And if Anne is right—if there is any lingering pity of gratitude in the King, will this not please and hold him better than vengeance?”

Norfolk and Suffolk both broke in together. What? Spare a foul enemy—the man who had spoilt and split the King’s “matter”? Were they turning into women? Was George’s brain pap? The one woman present looked at him with scorn.

“You grow too fastidious, George!” she said. “You and I used to think in one chord, and it made music I loved, but now you have changed and I have not. If I let that man die in his bed and in the King’s favour—I—— No, never while I breathe!—We will drag the seals of office from him and his hoarded riches and then—let him die in a ditch for all I care! Though by rights—and if I have my way—he shall die shorter by a head.”

Norfolk, Suffolk, and Northumberland applauded. The last could never forget the day when as Percy he had stood weeping and shamed before Wolsey—and the hateful marriage into which they had forced him. Thomas Boleyn, their father, joined in with zest. Only George remained nonchalant and sceptical.

“Take your way,—Anne can do all! But I said and say that a little mercy to a man nearing death will not be wasted on the King. Deep down in him he has a heart and——”

Thomas Boleyn, Earl of Wiltshire, broke in:

“My lords, do not listen to my son. He is poetry-mad, but it is only in idle verses men spare an enemy. Let us strike and hard. And I think that beyond any gratitude the King will prize Wolsey’s goods and chattels which will then be in his grip.”

Deep and loud applause which Anne seconded, clapping her hands. On one she wore Wolsey’s emerald ring. Wolsey’s plunder would be a king’s ransom from gratitude or any emotion but satisfaction.

It was agreed, but they sat so long over the haggling details that George rose yawning.

“Take your way,” he repeated, “but hear one last word. If you take a man and train him to blood and rapine in your cause, can you be surprised if he takes to it later on his own? I have said to Anne and I say that the Queen gripped the people’s liking by her deeds of mercy, and that even for pure policy——”

Anne cut furiously across him:

“And a pretty pass it has brought her to! If I must imitate her——”

George was as cool as ever:

“You cannot imitate her as yet in aging and sickness. But—I say this before all and sundry. She is the one woman the King respects. More—she fears her and she does not fear him. And why? Because she is just and proud and merciful and true——”

“And how many more of the Seven Deadly Virtues?” mocked Anne.

He went on unheeding:

“—and therefore the people are with her and Europe. And if—mark!—I do not say ‘when’—fate takes her scourge in hand for us we might be glad of the same allies. Now, my say is said.”

He pushed his chair back and went off whistling softly to himself knowing that Wolsey’s fate would be settled before the others dispersed, and on their heads be it! Not on his!

And so it was. If anything, Anne hastened matters because of George’s remonstrance. Coming from him it angered her indeed. Suspicious in all things now, she asked herself under what newer influence than her own he had fallen? Not his wife’s—a coarse-minded spying woman whom he detested and estranged daily. But whose?

Chapter Sixteen

A FEW days later Norfolk and Suffolk, boiling over with joy and importance which they scarcely troubled to hide, brought to Wolsey Henry's command for the return of the Great Seal, and with it the unexpected demand for the surrender of York House. Anne's growing magnificence aimed no lower than that abode of wealth and hoarded treasures. She itched to be at them with Henry. The formal charge was that he had used his power as legate contrary to English law. He pleaded guilty, and knowing that Anne would have his head if he resisted not only made this submission but submitted a list written with his own hand of all his treasures, imploring the King to accept them from his old servant. A broken man indeed!

Two motives were at work—the human hope of flinging enough to the pursuing wolves to secure his escape with his head, the other deadly sickness and weariness of life—that disease of the soul which in the Middle Ages so often had laid its hand on men's shoulders in mid-career and with the other pointing solemnly to the monastery whispered that there—there only in utter self-forgetfulness could peace be found. Let the King—let the Boleyns—gorge themselves with plunder. There remaineth a rest for the people of God—and though of those even self-deception could not count him one, in his great weariness of body the quietness of the dedicated life stole over him like a dim silver melody heard in twilight. It was not so hard to surrender these things as once he had believed. There might be balm even for a wound like his.

Still insatiate, Anne pounced upon them. It was a new excitement for her and for Henry. Du Bellai's keen French eyes, ever on the watch, reported as much to his government—

Yesterday the King came from Greenwich to view the said effects. He took with him only his lady-love, her mother, and one gentleman of the bedchamber—

and neither his government nor anyone else needed description of the Cardinal's hoarded wealth. It was only Henry himself who could match it—

if indeed he could. And Anne's tyrannous beauty flamed with victory and inflamed his heart the more as she ranged over the splendid rooms—now to be her own—and plunged her hands in priceless jewels and snatched at gorgeous stuffs. The kitten allure was on her that day—sweet greedy mischief with little shrieks and squeaks of delight, and Henry watched enchanted, himself laboriously totting up values while she darted about making fresh discoveries and hunting for more. A most profitable and triumphant day.

But it was not so pictorial later when word was brought him that trouble had vanquished his old servant and he lay in bed awaiting death. Though Henry's conscience had become the comedy of Europe and a jest which especially convulsed the French Court, it had sufficient life in his heart to prevent its premature burial for good and all, and now it stirred feebly under the stimulus of memory. If the one Irrevocable intervened and he had made no reparation what would God say when Wolsey laid the case before him? Reduced to the bare bones of fact that was his hidden question. God was the one incalculable quantity. It was only possible to guess vaguely what He liked and disliked and what His attitude towards a penitent Cardinal might be—but surely a little different from what could be confidently expected towards the unnamed rabble? Unanswerable questions of this nature always roused his uneasiness. Better be on the safe side. Mercy is the prerogative of kings and God will reward it. Many other such saws reinforced his decision. He seized a moment when Anne was off guard and despatched his own doctor Butts to the rescue, and arranged for Anne to be present on his return, for he dared not act wholly without her. She sat beside him, watching with angry eyes for any relenting in his.

“Have you seen yonder man?” Henry asked curtly.

“Yes, sir.” The doctor in his black cloak leaned on his ebony staff and looked gravely at the King.

“And how do you like him?”

Doctors in common with the clergy have a certain immunity. Butts said with conviction and a certain familiarity:

“Why, sir, if you desire his death I warrant you that he will be dead in four days if he has no immediate comfort from you!”

Despair—that was the man's ailment, so his words and looks stated. Anne leaned forward, silent but with sparkling eyes. She did not know that Butts had a secret message from Wolsey to her friend Henry Norris entreating him to ask “if the displeasures of my Lady Anne were now somewhat abated, her favour being my only help and remedy.” Nor would it

have softened her if she had. She glanced round sharply at Henry to gauge the effect upon him. It was instant. Death, God, and Wolsey jostled each other in his head, and one and all seemed ranked against him. He was frightened.

“Marry—God forbid! I would not lose him for twenty thousand pounds! I pray you go to him and do your best care for him.”

Butts, a kindly man, ignored Anne. The King’s doctor may even at times defy the King’s favourite. He said gravely:

“Then must your Grace send him some comfortable message.”

Henry was eager now:

“And so I will, by you. So make speed to him again and give him this ring from me for a token. This ring he knows well, for he gave it to me.” A ruby engraved with his own head. He turned to Anne: “And, good sweetheart, as you love me, send the Cardinal a token at my request, and in so doing you shall deserve my thanks.”

His eyes were perplexed, turning about like a schoolboy’s who has done some mischief beyond his healing and repents too late. George’s words flashed alight in her mind. She was teaching him to be flint to her enemies, but what if some day—No, no! Impossible! Still, she took the gold tablet that hung at her side—the one Wyatt had returned without a message—and delivered it to Doctor Butts “with very gentle and loving words,” such as she could use exquisitely when she chose.

Butts fled on his errand, and Henry’s arm about her, his kiss and “Anne—kind heart! Sweetheart!” were her rewards, but she loathed the necessity for pretense and could hardly hide it. It darkened the reckless courage in her, and her whisper as she clung to Henry was viperous under its sweetness.

“For you—for you alone I did it. He is what he is, and if he lives I will put the proof before you. O, do not think me a woman of malice and hatred! I could have loved him were he not your Judas.”

An implication which Henry accepted tenderly.

Wolsey recovered sufficiently to make her regret her mercy even more sharply. She bugled the Duke of Norfolk, now President of the Council, on to the hunt again. He was to repair the folly of her condescension by the threat to Wolsey that if he did not depart instantly for the North he would “tear him with his teeth,” and Wolsey fled to York, knowing that Anne was once more on his tracks. That was to be no safeguard. On a day, unhappy for him, Henry censured the Norfolk Council and angrily regretted the loss of Wolsey. That sealed his doom.

Anne flew to the King.

“And I who have wasted my time and honour—who have given you all—I am nothing! I will go—I will go! You can foster my enemy in your bosom. But what of me?”

She thrust into his hands a letter, secured by Norfolk and Suffolk from a Venetian physician who had been in Wolsey’s household—a letter of the Cardinal’s to Rome bearing out the man’s statement that he had written to the Pope praying him to excommunicate the King and lay an interdict on England if Henry would not dismiss “the Lady” and treat the Queen with due honour.

Henry stared at it, paralyzed for a moment. But in politics all things are possible, and he was not certain he believed it. It was too much in the interest of Norfolk and Suffolk for him to take anything so apt for granted. But he was at the parting of the ways with Anne and knew it. She was on her knees, kissing his hands.

“Have I not courted him when you desired it? But his false heart would have no friendship. Let me go, my life and my love. I have served your turn and I can die—though not in peace.”

The scene lasted for an hour, but she won. Holding her passionately against his heart he promised to arrest the man for high treason, and signing the warrant, put it in her hands. Salome had danced to some purpose! She, eager to inflict the last sting, put it into the hands of Percy to execute. That was but fair dues! He who had been humbled should humble! And so Percy came to York and arrested a dying man—himself frightened, milk-blooded as ever, trembling before that fallen Greatness, wishing Anne had chosen another errand-boy.

But there was no relenting. He caused the Cardinal’s feet to be roped to the stirrups of his mule as they used with criminals, and so journeying by slow stages brought him to Leicester Abbey on the way to London and to his death. For Wolsey had reached the end of a very chequered pilgrimage, and Hope had departed taking Life her companion with her.

“Had I but served my God as I have served my King He had not left me thus”;—the world knows that lament, as bitter as Solomon’s. But were the Fates given to retort they might have added the *envoi* that Wolsey’s service had a purpose and an eagerness for Henry’s gifts which he had never demonstrated for God’s and that he had received his wages in full according to his merits from both.

It is possible that the only person who shed a true tear for him and prayed a true prayer was Katharine, and she with many reservations.

And now the indecently triumphing Boleyns ruled England and believed that Anne's way to the Crown was clear. Only George Boleyn tasted doubt as the bitter drop mingled with the wine of victory.

And still the divorce dragged its slow length like a wounded snake. To Henry's raging indignation the Pope put forth a secret feeler with the suggestion that in a case of such difficulty it was possible that the King might be allowed two wives. And the same brilliant idea occurring to Luther, who, it was said, had allowed that solution in a case of amorous entanglement submitted to him, he had given it out openly that he would "rather allow the King to take two wives than dissolve the present marriage." The courts of Europe at all events dissolved in laughter, and Henry was as pleased as if a swarm of hornets had stung him about the ears. He felt himself rapidly becoming ridiculous, and ridicule is a weapon against which no shield has been devised. His case was not bettered by the joke which also traversed Europe, that every man in England stood by the King and every woman by the Queen, and, that being so, European wagers backed the Queen. Unendurable to Anne and to Henry!

He made another desperate attempt on the Queen's resolution—would she consent to relieve his conscience by agreeing to put the case before four English bishops and four English nobles?

Surely in vain is the net spread before any bird! She replied with her usual calm but a touch of humour:

"God send my husband a quiet conscience, but I mean to abide by no decision but that of Rome."

What could he do? Malice itself could not touch her name. Her life could not be attempted in any open manner for it was safeguarded by the Emperor. He could only take her reply in one of his almost insane paroxysms of fury and so fling away from Windsor, writing from London to bid her begone before his return for he would never see her again.

She was sitting by her window looking out over the waving tree-tops glittering in June sunshine far below when that ultimatum was laid in her hand. She waited a moment before opening it, still gazing over the serene beauty of the loveliest home in England in the loveliest month of the year. Gay distant voices floated in on the soft breeze,—the bells of Eton sounded low and golden from below and winding Thames (which gave the name of Windleshore—and made it Windsor) was merry with young rowers and bathers. She had come there as a bride. Many of her most joyous days had

been passed in those fair glades and by the shining water which flowing eternally had seen so many royal brides in happy youth, in serene age. She herself was aging now, but her age would not be serene. The sunset was stormy, angry with livid clouds and thunder, and only in the West a faint but steadfast light still shone. She may be seen still in the Versailles portrait as she sat in that window, an oval face, greying auburn hair shading the very high forehead. A look of brooding calm—the unmistakable imprint of great reserves of strength and quiet building an inward invincible fortress. The face is not beautiful, though those who knew her declare that she had much beauty as a young woman, but now trouble had fined away the accidents and left only the essential of the spirit within, an abiding beauty which great artists choose before youth's April pageant because it is in its nature the immortal preface to the Book of Life and the other fleeting as a rainbow shower.

She sat very still with the letter in her lap. It could only be some new insult stirring the old ache to misery. A moment more—a moment to fill her cisterns with peace! She closed her eyes with moving lips and opening them opened the letter also.

It was the true sentence of divorce. She must be gone and yield her place to another. A thing that sharpens the sting of death and is harder in life. She must leave her daughter to the tender mercies of the woman now with her husband in London—to a life of danger and cruel persecution, as she knew too well. All was over except the undying fight for her honour and her child's. Yet—she kissed the cruel letter before she laid it on the table beside her, and taking her beads from her side repeated a short prayer in which Henry's name was not absent. To a nature like hers, mild, royal, and devoid of rancours, it was impossible to break the beloved habit of so many years. She remembered him as centring her happiness, young, beautiful, fresh and golden as a dawn-god, tyrannically imperious, a spoilt child altogether lovable in her eyes—already older and wiser than his—mother as well as wife. How could it seem possible that he should not wake and remember and understand even now, though so late? For that she prayed.

When she had composed herself she sent a lady in waiting for the Princess Mary, and it was not long before she heard the sound of flying feet outrunning all formality, and the door was pushed open. The girl ran and threw herself on her knees before her, and putting her arms on the Queen's lap looked up at her with loving eyes.

“What is it, mother? More trouble? Always more trouble?”

The Queen smiled a little, smoothing the brown hair with light touches. She had put the letter behind her. Mary must not see that. But she looked with benignant sweetness on the young upturned face, to her beautiful, whatever it might be to others, in its perfect sincerity and kindness though even to her the firmly closed lips bore witness to restraint and reserve cruelly imposed upon a girl so young. It was as though her mother studied her now in everything that she might carry away that picture with her into desolation. Beautiful eyes, she thought, widely opened, short-sighted, pathetic in seeking wistfulness under broad perceptive brows. Delicately moulded chin and throat. Speaking, sensitive hands. And over all the look of perfect breeding, race that cannot be questioned and needs no assertion. The royal blood of the double kingship of her grandparents—the King of Aragon and the Queen of Castile. Yet her rival would most certainly be a child of the doubtful Boleyn blood reinforced by the Tidder or Tudor blood of a shabby Welsh squire whom a sensuous queen had picked out of her retinue for his thews and sinews—and had never troubled to acknowledge or prove her marriage with him, if marriage there had been, which there probably was not.

She sighed—and composed herself again, laying a hand on the young forehead.

“Daughter, I have had a letter from the King your father.”

A look of terror shot into the grey eyes, but the girl was silent.

“From your father. More trouble. One in which I need your help.”

“Blessed Lady, I give it, mother! I would give you my life.”

“This is perhaps harder, daughter. I want your assent and obedience—given cheerfully—to what will wound you sorely. We must bear it together.”

“We can bear anything together,” Princess Mary said, kissing her mother’s hands. There was a silence. Then—

“Together indeed, daughter. But—apart?”

Her sad training stood Mary in good stead. Her lip quivered a little, and she said nothing, still looking upward steadfastly.

“Dear my daughter, the King desires me to go away that I may live at one of my dower houses. You I may not take—but in that I see good, for the heir of England must be with the King. We may write but not meet. We may _____”

But the look of dumb anguish on Mary’s face stopped her. Mute as a dog wounded to death she looked up with faithful eyes in her mother’s face and was speechless. A terrible sight for a mother to see. The Queen gathered the

white face to her breast and shielded it with her arms as if from the very light of day.

“Darling, it shall be well with you. They dare not hurt you. The King would not,—and the Pope, the Emperor, all will protect you. And above all earthly kings sits the King of Kings. He will see justice done you.”

The girl hid her face.

“Will He see justice done *you*, mother?”

“He will see justice done *me* also,” the Queen repeated steadily. “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?”

“But the woman—the woman!” said the muffled voice from her knees. The mother took a hand and held it in her own cool palms.

“Daughter, you shall not hate her. That is to poison your own soul. Do not curse her because she sets us apart, but pray for her, for even now is the time coming when you shall have cause to pity her and lament her case.”

Silence. Then again the muffled voice:

“Mother, your commands are God’s to me. I will try.”

“Not only this,” said the Queen. “But I lay another command on my true daughter. Should the King have other children, as well he may—you are to cherish them as brothers and sisters and in all things to seek their good. Do you promise this before God?”

Mary lifted her head, the tears standing in her eyes but her mouth set in the steadfast line we know.

“Mother, I promise.” And the world knows she kept her promise faithfully.

“And now,” said the Queen, “we part, my daughter, my delight, for I am weak in body and have many things to do and to see your beloved face so wounds my heart that I think the life blood runs from it. But we will write—often—often. And we will meet again, for it is not in nature—not in the King’s nature—to keep us apart when once we three were so happy. Daughter, obey always the father in your king and the King in your father. And now—go while I have strength to bear your going, and send my good Lady Salisbury to me—and—*remember*.”

She turned so deadly pale that for a moment the Princess trembled from head to foot. Then with a low cry she flung herself into her mother’s outstretched arms and they clung together. Outside the happy voices and the pomp of the world’s summer joy. Inside the agony of tearing asunder one heart in two tender breasts.

Presently the arms dropped and with the terrible self-control taught her by misery the Princess Mary rose without another word. She retreated backwards to the door gazing steadfastly at her mother, there dropped her reverence to the Queen, and then turning fled back to her rooms. Silence absorbed her. The past was past, and in life they never met again. Those brief moments had ended their life together.

Chapter Seventeen

IN LONDON ANNE rejoiced. Another milestone on her victorious way! Yet for her also trouble was brewing.

For now Rome spoke in thunder, though at first with a still small voice and a certain secrecy, building a golden bridge for a flying foe if he had the wit to take it. The Pope wrote with his own hand to the King of England, a letter of paternal directness.

He brought it to Anne, speechless with a complication of feelings absolutely unutterable, and laid it before her. She read it, paling.

Henry was counselled under all religious sanctions “to put away one Anna whom he kept about him and to take to her home Queen Katharine his wife.” It appeared that even Rome dared not affront the combination of public opinion and the might of the Emperor Charles. The little kingdom of England, though steadily growing in importance, was as nothing compared with the Emperor’s European consequence, and the weight of public opinion was heavier still. The question had roused the world’s conscience whatever it had done with Henry’s.

There was a long pause, with the letter spread out before her. All their years of struggle and suspense, all the hatred of Wolsey and his destruction wasted—wasted. And what were they to do? Pope Clement had it in his power to excommunicate Henry and make him an abomination to his fellow-kings, to place England under an interdict and prevent every English man, woman, and child from the use of any means for the soul’s health. No priest could officiate. No marriage or burial service be read. And what would the feeling of the country be to “one Anna” when they despaired for this world and for eternity? Moreover both knew that this was a foreshadowing of the solemn decree.

It came. The great fulmination of Rome. The marriage with Katharine was pronounced valid. The Princess Mary’s birth stainless. If the King was in earnest about his troublous conscience he might quiet it now. God’s authority on earth had spoken, and he very well knew that all the best

elements in England as well as the mass of the people would rejoice at the decree.

He stared at Anne and she at him. The steel in her was unbending, but often and often she had feared his breaking before the storm or at the least temporizing with the spirit he had called up and could not lay. What would he do now? There had begun to be dreadful intervals in which she felt she had come to the end of her spells and charms and could invent no new one to hold him prisoner. She saw him as a sleeping giant who might wake suddenly in a rending rage with those who had drugged him. She was weary—wearied with disappointment, and he a lulled danger asking more than her frail feminine strength to chain him. He needed the sparkling draught of success, and she had brought him nothing but failure. They stared at one another haggardly, and for awhile there was silence. Then through her terror a ray flashed—inspiration that kindled her eyes into flame.

Cranmer. Had he not spoken of the resource of questioning the intelligence of Europe if Rome proved restive? He was at her father's house. Send! Send!

She sat revolving jostling expedients while they waited, Henry turning over the leaves of the great theological tome on her table with eyes that saw nothing. Wasted time. Wasted money, popularity, all the means he valued thrown away upon an end he could not gain. Wolsey had warned him, and the reward he had dealt out to Wolsey was death in forsaken misery. Anne had killed him as surely as if she had had the head she had so often asked for between kisses. And now—now? What next? He literally was at his wit's end, and she could only repeat, "Cranmer—Cranmer." And the news was flying over England, carrying rejoicing with it and the shrinkage of all the time-servers and trimmers into their shells until they could measure Henry's strength or submission against Rome's fiat.

Cranmer came in, mild, pale, and silvery, the intellectual spiritualized more by the necessities of his position than by conviction. The ocean wave of Luther's brutal courage and conviction sweeping through Europe had wetted him with its topmost spray. No more, but sufficient to stimulate his certainty that there are many sides to a question and any of them may be worth as much as the others. Why not? Men are many-minded. Truth is many-faced. For this reason he gave Anne as much of his knees as Henry. God works by strange means, and she too might be God's chosen instrument. Else why was she there?

He took his seat gently and reverentially at Henry's command, and the matter was opened to him with the decree itself upon which Henry had spat

in the first tempest of its reception.

Cranmer looked up, hesitating:

“This I have foreseen, my liege, since your Grace did me the honour to consult me, and indeed I considered it with my lord the Cardinal who was, as your Grace knows, very hardened and obstinate on the English obedience to Rome. And yet, by much that he said it was possible for me to disarm the weakness of Rome in face of these new bruits and doings on the Continent. Therefore it hardened my opinion that the famous jurists and heads of universities should be consulted in a matter so near to your royal conscience. And furthermore I have a question to put before your Grace’s wisdom—which wisdom greater than mine must answer. If the Pope’s Holiness is Head of the Church in a country must he not be also Head of that country, men’s consciences being what makes them men? Now is this a right or a desirable conclusion? God forbid that I should question the immaculate doctrines of Mother Church, handed down from Christ and his holy Apostles, but I ask your Majesty’s great knowledge to solve for me this question—Was the Chief of the Apostles appointed king of every earthly kingdom? And are kings who receive the delegated authority of God merely slaves to execute the decrees of the see of Peter?”

His placid melodious voice ceased, but had its harmonies rolled thunder they could not have more stirred Henry’s blood.

Twice his mouth opened and he could not speak—so crowding were the visions surging in his brain. Anne watched with great dilated eyes. Her theological studies had prepared her quick brain to catch Cranmer’s meaning, though not in its entirety. O, the gorgeous retort to Rome, the splendid pride of the English King’s answer:

“You will not? Then stand back. I advance without you. I am sole King and Lawgiver in my own kingdom.”

Henry stretched a mutton-fist across the table and crushed Cranmer’s delicate anæmic hand in his great grip.

“Were the see of Canterbury free this moment it should be yours and shall when Warham drops. This is the second word of sense and reason uttered in the whole rotten dirty business, and the first was yours also. What, God’s name man! am I not as good a Head in England as Clement, a rascally Italian that knows not our ways and thought, and we paying him dues and Peter’s pence and God knows what for doing nothing but gorge on it and pay his mistresses? As to hurting God’s holy doctrine, as I am crowned Christian king I dare not, and will disembowel any heretic that lifts his Lutheran head.

But as to the headship—God send us a good deliverance, for the way is found!”

“I think it is found if your Grace’s wisdom approves,” said Cranmer with gentlest deliberation, “but doubtless it will need time and thought and——”

“But with whom—whom?” Henry almost shouted, while Anne listened with sparkling eyes.

Cranmer folded his hands primly and spoke with precision.

“While I would not recommend him as a man of intellect or theological knowledge, your Majesty knows that one Cromwell who was about the Lord Cardinal is a man of affairs second to none, and if this matter go forward—there will be many affairs to settle—owing to the monstrous papal exactions in this country which indeed has been bled to maintain state in Rome. But for the rest—we cannot, alas! count on Sir Thomas More or Bishop Fisher, though both are worthy souls indeed. Yet I think Archbishop Warham would aid in drawing a case for the consideration of European men of learning such as would enlist their sympathies, and furthermore——”

His voice went on implacably and mildly, placing stone by stone in the wall of defense against Rome’s aggressions and as delicately as piecing mosaic. A keen intellectual indeed!

But Henry scarcely heeded detail in the impressionist view of the enormous vistas opening before him. He saw the fat gorged monasteries and convents asking to be depleted of their apoplectic riches. The bloated bishops whose allegiance was a quarter his and three quarters Rome’s! He saw the end, though not yet perfectly the means. But Cromwell—Cromwell who had helped him to track down Wolsey’s hidden hordes—*he* would see, *he* would know and be a mighty Nimrod behind the fleeing deer and foxes of the Roman Church in England!

He rose and struck Cranmer such a congratulatory buffet on the back as almost knocked the breath out of his narrow chest. He turned and kissed Anne loudly upon the lips, and she sprang up beside him, the two radiating hope and energy. Cranmer? What would be too much for him? He had saved her. And Warham was aging and sick. They would have his place empty and hurl Cranmer into it, and then—then—with a supple Archbishop of Canterbury, with Cromwell for a battering-ram in the rear, with all the partisans who would flock to a standard flaunting victory and promises of rich grants of land and money, who could say them nay?

Anne knelt for his benediction—a priest, all said and done!—and Henry stood paternally beside her little slender body as she bowed with heavenly

eyes and hands raised to praise God for the deliverance. And certainly it appeared to all three that angelic wings fanned the blessed air about them—so instant and celestial was the deliverance. Surely she had a star! Surely it would carry Henry with her to a triumph gilded not only by victory but by gold of the most solid and ringing quality.

The dubious look in Henry's eye was dissolved in radiance. She was his own darling, his own sweetheart again. The time would not now be long. No more wearisome legantine courts. No more endurance of the whims of Rome. Swift simple action within the reach of Henry's own jurisdiction, and then—the glorious end! What would he not do for her?—Anything but marry her before his own moment.

“The King's matter” was thrust forward as a new issue with fresh and bounding energy and so presented not only to Convocation but to Parliament.

The Church of God hath her foundation set upon a firm and steadfast stone of truth and not upon the mutable and wilful pleasure of Peter's successors.

This was a presentation much easier for Henry and more comfortably to be debated than Anne's and Katharine's rivalry. It got him away from the personal issue and offered a theological and political proposition which men could get between their teeth and chew with true partisan relish. Never a better appeal to the dogged English spirit weary of paying Peter's pence and dues for which they never saw a penny in their own hands!

Fisher and Thomas More beheld the lists set for a final and fatal battle. More resigned the chancellorship, knowing well that lust was still the real issue. Fisher clung steadfastly to Rome.

The news spread to the woeful wife and daughter and filled them with consternation. Did “the woman” dare to defy even God in His Church, and would He suffer an unchained devil's reign on earth? If this went through—if priests enough could be found to back Henry—even the Emperor's help was useless. To their minds he had added blasphemy to his black list of crime. Well,—Katharine might weep and pray and Mary tremble as much with fear as ague over her Latin, but the world was transforming itself under their eyes—a world that cared nothing for the old sanctions! And who but the Boleyns! Even George was humanized for a while into thrusting ambition by the glorious family fortunes. After all, Anne had known her business and the man she had to deal with. Follow my leader and away to the summit!

But now that achievement was so near she must be prepared for royalty. She must—unheard of glory!—be created a peeress in her own right, and to mark the honour still more as royal she must become Marchioness or *Marques* (as they called it) of Pembroke, one of the titles connected with royalty which had been formerly held by the King's own uncle. And why not a royal title for a lady who mingled Adam's coarser fluid with a far-back drop of royal blood somewhere in her pedigree?

Lest its appropriateness should be missed, Henry publicly declared the reasons which had induced him thus to strengthen the Crown and therefore the country.

Because a monarch ought to surround his throne with many peers of the worthiest of both sexes, especially those who are of royal blood, for this reason we with the consent of the nobility of our kingdom present do make, create and ennoble our cousin Anne Rochfort one of the daughters of our well-beloved cousin Thomas Earl of Wiltshire and of Ormond Keeper of our Privy Seal, to be Marchioness of Pembroke, and also by putting on of a mantle and the setting a coronet of gold on her head do really invest her with the name and title and to her heirs male.

It was noted there was no restriction to "the legitimate heirs of her body," and men winked to each other.

But a revenue must follow a peerage even for a lady who has the Privy Purse at her disposal, and this was remembered to the tune of twenty thousand pounds a year. Thomas Boleyn and the Duke of Norfolk signed the charter as witnesses, and it was impossible that the uncle should refrain from a whisper to the proud father that Anne had certainly brought her pigs to a better market than Mary, and he wished her joy on it! To which Boleyn retorted not unaptly that he well might be joyful since she had made him President of the Council! The Duke prudently agreed. What man would not desire to have such daughters in the family? Possibly even the despised Mary might have created a royal appetite for the Boleyn allure, and if so, gratitude was her due also.

Anne was at Windsor for the investiture, and even Windsor has not seen many more attractive ceremonies. She had called on Simonette to surpass herself in her art of burnishing beauty's weapons, and Simonette with every auxiliary had risen magnificently to the occasion. Henry had supplied the all-glorious robes for her at a cost of nearly eight hundred pounds and had

added a set of Holbein's miniatures set in magnificent jewels (to be far less valuable) to wear as ornaments.

"Give me the miniatures," was George's comment, "and you may keep the jewels!" He had just come back from the Continent.

But Henry in his royal generosity had also presented her with plate (much of it from Wolsey's stores) silver and silver-gilt to the value of over twenty thousand pounds. She could look with pride on her "cupboards" and "stands" glittering royally and ecclesiastically. Where do the leaves flutter in the winters of all those summer splendours?

"There is only one day that will make you more beautiful, Anne!" said Simonette significantly as she stood back to survey her work, "and that is not far off. Walk like a queen, for such you look. Blessed Lady!—what clothes can do for a woman!"

The King sat on his state chair in the Chamber of Salutations and about him a great train of courtiers, and to them entered Anne's procession. First, Garter King at Arms, carrying her patent. Then Lady Mary Howard, the Duke of Norfolk's daughter and first cousin to the heroine of the day. She carried the robe of state of royal crimson velvet set off with ermine, and in her right hand a golden coronet. Then came the Lady Marques in a surcoat of crimson velvet with ermine and her dark hair smoothed and rippled and hanging about her in profusion. A countess walked on either hand, and she went modestly, her eyes fixed upon the ground, followed by a train of ladies. Strange thoughts struggled in her as she went. How easy it had been to gain it all—so far as the King had power! The obstacles had all been outside and once conquered there lay before her a smooth sea of splendour where, crowned Queen at last, she should see her children ousting the hated Katharine's and sway the King (tactfully) in public as she had done in private ever since he laid his heart at her feet. Under that modest seeming she was drunk with power.

How he watched for her also with joy he could not hide! Always she out-topped his expectations and shone a living flame of beauty illuminating all the tortuous ways she compelled him to follow. How could any heart resist her? he thought as she came forward at a gentle pace, her little hands folded, her long silken tresses hanging to her knees. Had anything so lovable ever been created elsewhere? His hand trembled a little as he took the charter, and he fumbled with the gold loops that secured her robe of state as he put it upon her slender shoulders. He placed the golden coronet low upon her brow as she had instructed him secretly must be done if she were to look her best. All must acknowledge it. None had her lovely grace, her quick soft

eyes. They caught and held his as she knelt before him. He must take her with him to France when he went to warm the flickering flame of French cordiality. They must see his beauty of beauties and envy him. Du Bellai was pressing it upon him—that visit—! Yes, he must go and show Europe the chosen queen. Had not du Bellai told him that not in Europe itself was a woman to match “my Lady Marques of Pembroke”?

She hesitated a little when they were alone and flushed with his gift-giving he told her this. France? France? What she wanted was marriage and then France! Would they take her seriously? She had known a different France—where her own gifts had brought her the little glittering niche where she shone. A France that had danced after her and with her and mocked and caressed and made its own of her, but after how different a fashion from what its greeting to the future Queen of England should be. France—who never takes things seriously from the great God to the latest *coup* in politics, but must jest in the very teeth of solemnity. How could she impose herself on France? Henry saw her hesitation and turned it into resolution by the hint that he must go, if not with her then without her. A bachelor meeting. Those bachelor meetings in France—she knew them with their lavish wines and gay stories and the prettiest women from North and South to reinforce their meanings. She clasped her hands as if at a signal, not daring to press the marriage question.

“To see France with my own dear heart—O, gay! Gay! And we will go in splendour as befits the King of all the world and take our musicianers and *disars* [reciters] and make them stare with envy. O, I know them and the little darts they fling and little stinging jests they launch unless they are *comblés*—*ecrasés* with splendour. But—” she grew suddenly grave—“what lady of theirs shall receive me as I should be received? It should be the Queen of France—for it will mean much in England.”

But Henry broke in bull-mouthed:

“The Queen of France—the Emperor’s sister—my wife’s niece! I tell you I had as soon see the devil as a lady in Spanish dress. And that one, of all! God, no!”

“Then who must it be?” cooed Anne. She herself had no passion for meeting a lady who would certainly freeze her with a December of iced *politesse*, if even her husband could drag her so far. But yet it must be some lady high enough to heighten Anne’s own consequence, or it would be the worse for her.

“We will consult du Bellai,” said Henry subsiding. “As you say, sweetheart, it must be some high woman. Anything lower would be a slight

to me and to our hope. I will speak with him.”

With du Bellai who was recounting to his government almost every word he said secretly to Anne—even to “the devil and a lady in Spanish dress”! But he knew how to make himself liked, all the same.

“I am alone every day with the King when he is hunting,” wrote that gayest of clerics,

He chats familiarly with me and sometimes Madame Anne joins our party. Sometimes he places us both in a station to see him shoot the deer and whenever he arrives near any house belonging to his courtiers he alights to tell them of his feats. Madame Anne has presented me with a complete set of hunting-gear consisting of a cap, bow and arrows and a greyhound. I do not tell this as a boast of the Lady’s favours but to show how much King Henry prizes me as the representative of our monarch, for whatever the Lady does is directed by him.

Which shows that even a courtier-priest may not have eyes as keen as he thinks them, and may also be tactful enough not to remind his own much-prized monarch that he is Henry’s only shield from Rome and the Emperor.

But Henry consulted him on the delicate—really international—question of Anne’s journey to France, and du Bellai wagged his head and was appropriately solemn over such an importance. Yes—yes—of course the greatest of greatest ladies——

And here Henry interrupted:

“Excepting only the Queen of France! I respect her as all the world respects her, but she is the niece of my brother’s widow and——”

O, of course—of course! Who could understand that better than du Bellai? And, released, he seized his pen:

If our Sovereign wishes to gratify the King of England he can do nothing better than invite Madame Anne with him to Calais and treat her there with great respect. None the less it will be desirable that the King of France brings no company of ladies (and indeed there is always better cheer without them) but in case they *must* come he had better bring only the Queen of Navarre to Boulogne. As to the Queen of France, not for the world would he see her, for he says he would as soon see the devil as a lady in Spanish dress.

How did du Bellai know that and everything in the Court of England? He could have told the French ministers that Anne's fripperies with the King's in preparation for that gorgeous visit were charged in the Privy Purse accounts at something over two hundred thousand pounds present-day money, while Princess Mary was given two hundred pounds to spend on her necessities. But certainly Anne presented a brave show with her train of ladies. And wrath was well hidden behind her smile when they arrived at Boulogne to find the French King urbane but ladyless—not even the light-hearted a-moral Queen of Navarre having courage for the adventure of meeting the Harlot of European fame. Not that the Queen condemned her practices, whatever they might be—but merely that no self-respecting royal lady could stand the Boleyn assumptions. It was the more annoying, more disastrous, because a woman with Anne's reputation, so eggshell, so cracked already, frail as the airiest porcelain, fleeing on a blow-away breath, could not possibly appear without a hostess for chaperon before the French King and his *gaillard* courtiers. And as a consequence the gay dresses would be wasted which had made such low water in the English Exchequer and had reduced Princess Mary to her last chemise. What can a sensitive woman do in such cases? She was mortified to the bone. The French way—to stab with a bow! She dragged Simonette instantly from her interesting very private whispers with French intimates and dashed back to Calais.

There she would be on English ground. There she could welcome the French King with the background of Henry's splendour—the banquetting chamber hung with tissue embossed with silver and framed with cloth of silver raised with gold—the very seams of the panels covered with goldsmiths' work in broad wreaths set with jewels and pearls. There shone the cupboards of seven stages high, resplendent with Wolsey's magnificence of plate beside the King's. There, where her own unrivalled taste had devised the setting, she could feel at home and entertain the French King as she should. Under the ten branches of silver-gilt and ten branches of polished silver flaming with wax-lights she stood in Wolsey's enormously jewelled head-dress to welcome him, and Francis, remembering his own amorous advances to her not so long ago, could almost have excused Henry's follies—especially where they had played into his own hands. What could exceed his courtesy?

She became *disease*, and recited for him with all the charm he remembered. She disappeared and returned with seven ladies all chosen for their beauty and all masked like herself, decked out in strange fashion in cloth of gold slashed with crimson satin, puffed with cloth of silver and laced with gold. The London tailors had sweated to some purpose for them.

These masked beauties were led in by four damsels-errant in crimson satin, and Anne invited the French King to dance, and every lady took a lord. In the midst of the dance Henry forcibly unmasked the seven English roses, and lo! Francis was never so enchantingly surprised!—he had danced with his friend of bygone days—the all-conquering Anne. He reminded her with well-feigned tenderness how he had scolded the cruel English Ambassador who had enforced her father’s decision those years before. How they had beautified her! If she had stayed in France—was the heart of a French king less susceptible than that of an English king? Henry watched delighted. Had he not known she must conquer?—And next morning came the inevitable climax for her—a gorgeous “jewel” set with heaven knows what splendours! and eagerly valued at fifteen thousand crowns. She had received the chrism of French approval. Simonette herself was half doubtful whether they might not have done better in France after all. At least the French were incapable of the tiresome moral scruples of the English and would never disgrace themselves by crying, “Nan Bullen shall not be the King’s—delight.”

They returned to England confident, assured of the French support. Francis had sponsored their marriage in the face of Europe. Their enemies were more or less fugitive.

The Boleyns were now the front phalanx on the stage. By a direct interposition of the Lord of Hosts Archbishop Warham—another lath painted to look like iron—was dead and the willowy resistant upspringing Cranmer in his place. It was true that Parliament had addressed a most officious petition to the King urging him to “take home” Queen Katharine, but that could be slid over by a little astucity and the hope of the good time coming. And the kind Cranmer acted swiftly and with the supple non-resistance in which his pliant nature excelled.

Why insult Rome face to face? Has not England her own concerns and power? He petitioned the King for leave to settle the vexed question of the divorce. Henry graciously did not withhold his leave. Swiftly the court of the Archbishop was formed within a few miles of Katharine’s retreat. Swiftly they cited her again and again to appear before it. She remained proudly silent and was declared contumacious and the marriage null and void. She and the King were given permission to marry where they would. The Princess Mary was declared the King’s bastard.

Chapter Eighteen

FREE to marry where he would! But would he marry where he should? If he had married her the moment Cranmer's decree was pronounced it would have given Katharine's friends the mortal blow that would have prevented them collecting their forces and those of Rome. So Anne believed. But he delayed—and why? Why? During the last year she had suspected that these delays had more in them than the difficulties of the situation. Was it that—as she had guessed so long ago—he distrusted his own virility and that she had made a crowning blunder in accepting what she called secret wifehood and knew was nothing?

It was a time of straining trial for her, and too often she postponed all her brilliance and humour to the happier days she promised herself and allowed the threadbare of the cruelly anxious vindictive fighter to show through the glossy velvet pile of the voluptuous gaiety Henry had loved in her. Apart from the hope of a child, there were times when unconsciously he thought of her as he did of Cromwell—a mere fighter in the front, and her hard cleverness and subterfuge wearied him while they helped the joint battle. He got no rest from her and needed it. No one but Simonette knew the nights of unrest that alternated with her days of struggle and plotting and half-hysterical triumph while the King still made no move to marriage, and even Simonette did not hear her prayers. Prayers! The Almighty receives strange petitions. In her heart she doubted whether He could be persuaded to thwart His chosen Rome. But He must be reminded that she and Henry had never questioned Rome's doctrines and never would. Only its worldly supremacy! Again, there were days when the heavens were as brass above her and she remembered French mockeries and George's Italian agnosticism and ceased all prayer to a God who bore such jesting without repartee. Yet again, no chance must be lost, and with Simonette she made a secret pilgrimage to our Lady of Walsingham to pray for a child, and returning jested with Simonette over its credulities and deceits; true child of the Renaissance swaying between blind materialism and gross superstition according to the mood of the moment.

She consulted George with nervous laughter over a little incident. One of her girls had found a prophecy in some broad-sheet: Queen Katharine on her knees weeping, Anne herself a headless corpse, and Henry regarding both. All this to come to pass if she married Henry.

“And she said to me with eyes like an owl’s, ‘Madam, will you dare?’ and I answered I had sooner be Queen one day and fall on a scaffold the next than lose so great a prize. I have no ghostly follies, not I!”

He answered her little laugh with a gaze grown direct and a little aloof. Certainly his respect for Rome had not grown during his absence abroad. He had been in company with the men who were using every file of theology to grind off the fetters of that spiritual despotism. Their dawn of courage and confidence had caught some response in him where the old outlook had left a void. Carelessly at first, but afterwards with interest, he had read Tindal’s translation of the New Testament and had brought Anne a copy, contraband and to be carefully guarded. He wondered now whether among her thrusting cares and splendours she had found time to turn a page.

“Why, as to prayer—” he said, swinging his legs from the table after his old fashion but with a different eye upon her,—“let us be reasonable! Suppose one of the King’s rebels comes and says, ‘Sir, I am your traitor and so propose to remain. Meanwhile it will further my very treacherous ends if you present me with lands and a sufficient revenue to pursue my very nefarious occupations.’ I think there are two courses such a king might take in his reply. Have the wretch to the Tower and boil him alive (and I believe the King in question has the power to roast delinquents eternally) or feed him with favours that he may the more mortally commit himself and so perish publicly as well as privately by way of the deathbed and the coffin. I am not more afraid of death than another, but when the Skeleton lays a bony finger on a man’s shoulder and stares at him with undeceivable eye-sockets—Anne, have you read in my book?”

“I have read some comfortable words but nothing contrary, so far, to the teaching of Holy Church and all her means of salvation, and I hope I know how to follow her institutions. Ask if I have missed my confession or masses, or will! I am as well with God as another through the means Himself has appointed, and why should I not ask and have?”

“It resolves itself into a question of things that I question whether your confessor is competent to answer,” says George, with his ironic melancholy. “For my part, at the moment I am no beggar to heaven and occupy myself in making a God in my own image after the fashion of all men who give Him a thought. He is as yet something of a cynic, neither throwing inkstands at the

devil like Luther nor holding a candle to him like Pope Clement but allowing something to be said for both. I think Him subtler than either, but He is so swift a shape-changer that I doubt if I track Him down on this side Styx. Therefore I make no comment on your prayers except to warn you that a pebble looses an avalanche, and the lady who professed to like potted sprats was sent a barrel of them and died of surfeit. Let us compare results later. I find the subject interesting.”

He swung off, leaving her lonely. Her own mind was so full of desolate questionings that much of her life was the effort to pull a little safeguarding curtain of human companionship between herself and the cold night outside. It takes a soul either callous or serene in wisdom to face the phantoms of the mind, and hers was neither. Therefore she sent for Smeaton and Brereton and passed an hour talking Court scandals of the grossest—her tongue had grown free in Henry’s companionship even for a free age. They sang a little to their three lutes exquisitely harmonized and Anne fed Mark Smeaton with sweetmeats and Brereton snatched them jealously and Madge Skelton came in with Francis Weston and Norris and Anne Saville and music was sent for and dancing presently degenerated into a wild romp and fondling and snatching of kisses in which my “Lady Marques of Pembroke” was not backward. Something in Smeaton attracted her more than anything in the others. She could fancy him dancing alone in the wild woodlands at Hever—yes, in that haunted spot where the oaks fell back and left an open space for moonlight. There, looking up at the staring moon with wild hair flying back from his forehead, he would caper like a goat and beckon, and the woodland creatures would crowd in a furry ring, motionless to see him, the owl perched on a withered branch glaring at him with broad bright eyes. She saw that vision often as she lay awake at night. It was as though he had some deep fascination for some goblin impulse in herself. Was it witchcraft?—Had he a drop of devil’s blood or was it the lure of nature in spring? He smelt of woods and fresh-turned earth dewy in the night. His very ugliness had the look of pricked ears alive to sounds too fine for human creatures. You looked instinctively at his feet—though that is a fable, no more! She could be silent in his company as in no other, while he touched strange harmonies on his lute and muttered uncouth little songs to muted strings. A faun come to Court who had never changed his ways for Henry or another! All this he seemed to her, perhaps wholly mistakenly, for the man lived his life like others, so they told her. But she dangerously liked his love-making—wild careless love with drifts of bird-music and no more responsibility than a cuckoo’s. And she thought she knew where to stop, and Smeaton, like

all wild things, was all nerves and half hating and more easily checked than Brereton or Weston. A changed tone, and he was off.

After they had all gone she lay back in her chair exhausted, sipping at a silver cup of wine at her elbow. She had had enough and to spare already, and with your leave or by your leave Simonette took it and emptied it out of the window. She had small opinion of the lavish use of wine as a cosmetic.

Then she spoke in a voice so firm that it suggested a frown and arms akimbo to Anne who was too languid to look at her.

"I have a word to say, Anne. I have followed your fortunes faithfully, have I not?"

"Surely. And very much to your own interest," she retorted. "You have a box of good jewels that many a maid of honour skimping on her mother's second-best pearl necklace would envy. As for money—I have been no niggard, and what with the King's gifts and the heapings of all the men who run to kiss my shoes and the men and women who court me for what I have to give you are a rich woman, and you know it. Where do you hoard your gains?"

The tone was not winning nor yet laughing, but Simonette, with an end in view, was unruffled. Temper would never stand in her way. She said composedly:

"You have been generous and I thank you. And in gratitude I give you my best counsel. You have need of rest—great need. I cannot lay my finger on any one sign of aging and say, It is here, and yet, Anne, these years have not left you untouched. You work your beauty like a spurred horse, and it craves for quiet. You eat and drink as you will, and surely a diet of herbs and fruits is the one for the skin that men love and the bright blood coursing beneath it to fire the eyes. I know a woman in Paris. She had been a great liver and lover, and at thirty-six when I was a girl of ten she saw her beauty oozing from her drop by drop like a squeezed fruit. She despaired. Death would have been easier to bear. So she went to an old witch in the forest beyond Verrières le Buisson—far beyond, and alone, for witches do not like men's company. And the wise woman said, 'Go into the Convent of the Holy Innocents and live on bread and water and fruits and herbs and wash your face with vervain tea and go to bed with the lark and get up with him and walk barefoot in the dew and morning sunshine and you shall see a resurrection without aid of priest or prayer.' So she did this and went in a weary woman and came out a girl—April and fleet-foot."

Anne turned and looked at her with some interest.

“And then?”

“And now she is still living and my cousin writes me that men still resort to her for her fair body and quick wit. And I say this—Come with me, Anne, to Sopewell Nunnery and give yourself a month’s peace or more. Let only the King’s Grace know, and live as I have told you and you will see the good and bless me.”

“And it may be that God’s and our Lady’s blessing may attend another pilgrimage to a holy place,” Anne said thoughtfully. “There I can pray for a child. A child,—O Simonette, a child for my redemption!—Never a woman so longed for the pain and danger of childbirth as I.”

Simonette looked at her with narrowed eyes.

“The Queen had sons and to spare, but they died. A child needs a healthy father as well as a young and healthy mother. Were the King a young man, smelling of the wild woods, the breath of the trees and meadows in his hair, fleet of foot, spare and bright-eyed, that child would not be born dead or pining after the fashion of royal children, but a lusty kicking screaming boy fit to wear a crown and rejoice the heart of a royal father. So say I. But what the Fates will, they will.”

There fell a dead silence between the two women.

Presently Anne lifted her head.

“Simonette, I will go to Sopewell and pray for a child. Other women go to holy places and return rejoicing. Walsingham was silent for me. I will try again.”

Henry smiled on the notion. It was easy to convince him she needed rest after the long struggle, easy to believe that Sopewell might flatter his deepest hopes. Also there was a certain little house by a certain yew tree not far from Sopewell where they could meet in greater quiet than Court life and the splendours of the Lady Marques of Pembroke permitted. She would go humbly to the nunnery. It would be more pleasing to God if she took twenty persons in her suite than fifty, and because it was in the nature of a religious retreat she would take only two lute players instead of an orchestra of varied musicianers. She would naturally choose those whose company as well as music was agreeable to her.

So with a modest suite the Lady proceeded to the fluttering Convent of Sopewell where every nun from the oldest to the youngest was a-tiptoe to see the most talked of woman alive. They could not fail to commend her beauty and gentleness as with bowed head and exquisite modesty of demeanour she entered the convent and was led, scattering gracious thanks,

to the set of rooms looking out upon a quiet garden (now debarred to all others) and was there enthroned with all their simple comforts enhanced by the rich movables sent down from London. They foresaw and rightly, noble gifts to the chapel and charities, and royal favours showered on deserving heads, and were glad hostesses to the Lady who ruled England—very much to England's displeasure.

But Anne sank dreamily into the sunny quiet of the place. It was early winter, but the little garden at Sopewell trapped the sun and scorned the snow and winds, and carnation flowed back into her lips and cheeks and soft brightness to her eyes, and each day drifted by with pale wintry skies and soft sunshine and great fires roaring on the hearth, and Smeaton and Chambers quartered outside played and sang to her when she needed the anodyne of music, and the nuns went softly on their errands. She gladdened and strengthened into beauty like the tossing lilacs at Hever when spring walks abroad to count her treasures. Also she visited the chapel daily at Matins and lauds and made her prayers and offerings with devout observance very edifying to the ladies of the convent and their abbess, who pronounced her in private a much misjudged and calumniated woman whose disarming sweetness should win her better praise.

And Henry rode down to Sopewell and they met in peace and there were moments when he and she agreed that life in a country palace with great gardens and woodlands to seclude its peace would outshine the costly turmoil of London or the greatest court in Europe, and both yawned in so saying. Can the drunkard foreswear his wines or the gambler his dice?

Still, for more than three months she took her ease at Sopewell. And at last there came a day for ever to be remembered and blessed not only by those two but by the whole realm of England.

Pale with the wild beating of her heart Anne was carried in her litter to the tryst with Simonette riding beside her. A light snow had fallen, and the air was crisp with sunshine and sparkling like wine foaming in a golden cup. She lay embedded in costly furs, warm and languid, her face alone showing like a flower above the snow of ermines. By the yew tree Henry met her—alone, his men standing among the trees, Simonette far in the background. He lifted her from her furs, still robed in a great velvet mantle rich with ermines, and led her into the house, her waist clasped in his great arm.

"It is lonesome in London without my sweetheart," he said fondly, "and now the ways grow miry you must return soon. Weary work as usual! My brother's widow fuming at Bugden and writing wicked rebellious letters to all and sundry, and Europe smouldering and a king's work harder daily, and

my heart's joy down at Sopewell, and what shall a poor man do for comfort?"

She looked in his face with delight glowing in her own. She took his arms and locked them both about her.

"Hold me close," she said. "I have that to tell you that we cannot hear apart."

He looked in her face and dimly perceived something new, marvellous, —something to change the world and themselves with it, but what it was he dared not think. There was one thing, one only—— No, no—it could not be! The prize of conflict, the seal of love. She could feel his heart throbbing against hers as if it would break its way to union.

"Speak!"—he said. "Is it what I think—hope? God! Is it that?"

She flung her arms about him also and so interlaced spoke low and clear.

"My heart—my own, I have prayed at this blessed place. I have spent hours on my knees. I have made rich offerings. God has triumphed with us. I bear your son within me—our victory, our joy. I, your true wife—who have fought beside you, I give you your son."

Silence. She looked up frightened. He was grey and speechless with emotion. Even she had not known how rooted was this thing in his very heartstrings. Fearing he would choke—some stroke of God's wrath on her—she struggled free to help him, and then the great freshet of his joy broke loose in waves and torrents and swept him away into raptures that almost terrified her—well as she knew his moods. He was a man mad for joy. He shouted and flung his arms abroad swearing confusion to all their enemies. Marriage—marriage, and life one long triumph and joy. She did her best to curb him, thinking with terror that these gross red-faced men stand sudden joy as ill as sudden fear. She should have broken it smoothly—smoothly. But no—joy seldom kills, and presently he was calling loudly for wine and a rich meal after his ride and pulled her down to him and fondled her before the men who were coming and going to wait upon them.

"And our marriage—where? How? Cranmer shall advise and Cromwell. —Cromwell is a good and worthy servant. Secret it must be but sound and strong as Holy Church can make it. O, the good day! Are you mad with joy, my heart's love? But go softly—softly. Even you I could not forgive if you hurt my son by a careless thought or deed."

She curled against him sighing as if for joy.

"More glad than gladness' self. O, I will care for him—he is my star, my son—and yet more—yours. Should he not be dear to his mother? But this—

my love, my husband—let me be happy for his sake and then he shall do well. I have suffered—I am weary of the snaky tongues and cruel delays and the hatred of the Queen. Make the way smooth for me and for your son. You are King. For awhile let there be no troubles—no more delays, that so the little one and I may live to break the courage of your enemies and mine.”

He swore on the Holy Cross that so it should be. And what had she to fear? With Cranmer and Cromwell he was uprooting the power of the Pope in England. Not a priest would dare to lift his heel against them. The wealth of the swollen monasteries would pour into their laps and put their own wealth beyond that of any European king. And this son’s birth would justify him before all Europe in the fight he had waged for freedom for England and his own. All was well now—better than well. Let them eat and drink and rejoice together, for the battle was won.

Sitting by his side she ate and drank to repletion, relishing the delicate viands and rich wines after the abstemiousness of the convent life which Simonette had forced upon her. Not but what Simonette was right. Youth and hope flowed together in her veins like a cordial, and all the world was lit up like a fête for her joy. In every word Henry uttered she felt the change. She had been the sweetheart—beloved, adored, but—dangerous, contraband! Now she was the wife—to be cherished, honoured openly, the pledge of all his future. He called her “wife”—and when she said slowly, “The Queen?”—he laughed aloud.

“There is only one Queen. You—the mother of my son. Our marriage—and then such a coronation for you as London shall remember and talk of down the ages. It shall send my brother’s widow wild with envy. But the better—the better.”

“And Princess Mary?”

He smiled confidently.

“She is nothing and less than nothing. It is a favour if we let her hold up her brother’s train at the christening. O—good God! Shall I go mad with joy before I can get you to London and make you mine and care for you like the treasure of the world? You must not stay here, sweetheart. I will never forget the sweet spot where my joy came to me, but you must be near my good Butts—the worthiest physician alive. Tell the nuns and the abbess that I entreat their prayers to our Blessed Lady and that you return swiftly to London and their dutiful service to you shall not be forgot while I am crowned King. And now I ride to London to settle all for your welfare. And how shall I leave you? How? Good things come hard. I am weary as if I had fought a battle.”

“You have fought a battle like the bravest knight under arms, and you have conquered,” she told him. Looking at him she saw his subdued fierceness all flung into this new channel, though he lay with his great head broad as a tiger’s on her bosom, his swelled hands grasping hers—hot and flaccid, aging daily. But she could rule England without him with her son beside her. She saw him now only as a creaking bridge to her own future. The day would come when he would have served his turn and hers.

She caressed him sweetly.

“I will come soon—soon. But make me happy. This is my hour, and I ask it for your son’s sake, for what am I? Thanks to our Blessed Lady the viper Wolsey is gone to his own place and cannot thwart us. Go, my heart, my dear heart, and make ready for me. I have been a comrade—I have helped, have I not?”

He heaped her with praises and would stay the night to drink deep of her new sweetness. She who had felt herself exhausted of all novelty—almost depleted of all that had won him, now shone irradiate with a thousand new charms. She felt her power, felt them thronging into her until it seemed that their love had become a new thing—a fresh bridal,—the spousals of all but omnipotent gods.

“I am safe for ever and ever,” she told Simonette after Henry had ridden reluctantly away next day, turning and turning to look and wave his hand as if he could not lose the sight of her. The night before, speeding ahead of him to London a man had ridden at a gallop to Cranmer with orders that would change her from a marchioness to a queen, and speed itself was too slow for the new energy bursting into fierce life in Henry.

“I am secure!” she thought with a long relaxing sigh, sinking into her furs and swaying to the measured tread of the men who bore her back to Sopewell. Her very thoughts swayed to a measure. Now Henry would be absolutely at her devotion. She could do what she would. She could strengthen her party by showering gifts and places right and left. She could wither such enemies as More and Fisher, who had half killed her with their oppositions and delays. And, most of all, Katharine would at last acknowledge herself beaten. The woman with her child would like the woman in the Apocalypse stand with her feet upon the sun, haloed with the moon, terrible as an army with banners. She—she—had brought to England freedom from Rome and all her vexations and tributes. She would win the love of the people and the past lie dead and the glorious future begin.

She said as much to Simonette when orders had been given for the return to London and Simonette replied gravely:

“It may be so. It should be so. Your strength is great indeed. But—I ask you this, Anne—has my counsel been wise and useful or has it not?”

Anne looked up.

“Useful. I own it. And what then? Take this ring in memory of good service.”

She drew off an emerald from her slender middle finger and slipped it upon Simonette’s heart-finger. Simonette thanked her and forced it on. It glowed baleful and beautiful on the sallow whiteness of her plump hand.

“Then, if it be so, I say this. Do not keep Smeaton near you. It was right enough when you were a merry girl—such men do well to set off pageants and masques. But Smeaton is no man for attendance on a wife, Queen, mother. Pension him richly. Let him hang about the Court if he will, though I had sooner see him in France—or in his coffin, in either of which places he would do better than with us. But have done with him as a mate for dance and frolic. This I ask as an earnest request. Is it granted?”

Anne pouted and hesitated.

“The King says I am to have all I wish and any lightest word a law. And there is no harm in the man—a madcap, moonstruck, witch-struck thing!—there is none like him in his goblin way. No, I cannot miss Smeaton.”

“I do not ask twice,” Simonette said darkly. “Then have your way. Only, remember my counsel. I tell you the man would be better in his coffin than treating you like a fellow-mummer. Well—I have spoken. Hey for London!”

It hurt Anne a little to leave the quiet garden and the echoing ways and still oriel rooms of the nunnery—eager as she was for the new glories, the new powers, the day of dominion. But she went and in a fret of preparation, and so reached her London palace.

On St. Paul’s Day, the 25th of January, the snow lay lightly on the muddy ways of London and the sun rose in a blue and frosty sky. The very air appeared to sparkle with frost crystals in that early dawn. And to Dr. Rowland Lee, one of the royal chaplains, was carried an order to celebrate the mass this very dawn in a great empty attic of the royal house of Whitehall. A strange whim of his Majesty’s, thought Dr. Lee, donning his robes in haste and all but running to the appointed place.

A group of worshippers awaited him, few but distinguished, two ladies and three men. The King, with, in attendance, Henry Norris and Heneage formerly in the service of my lord Cardinal, now both grooms of the Chamber. The ladies—my lady Marques of Pembroke and Anne Saville her

train bearer. But why? How?—The good man looked about him hesitating and bewildered. The King stepped forward and spoke in his strong voice.

“I require and charge you to perform the holy rite of marriage between me and this lady here present and before these three witnesses.”

Some say the man still hesitated between his spiritual duty and his fears: “Were the parties free to wed?”—and that Henry assured him the Pope had given his dispensation for the ceremony. If so, it was not for him to question his sovereign’s will. Some say he trembled and obeyed, speechless otherwise. But in either case the rite proceeded, the vows were exchanged that made them one flesh, and when it ended the bridegroom turned and kissed the bride on the lips, bidding all separate and keep the matter secret until the due time should come for the announcement. At present they were the favoured depositaries of a State secret. Even Cranmer knew nothing as yet of what was done. Each went his way, and whereas the Marchioness of Pembroke had entered that grim and silent room it was the Queen of England who left it, with young Anne Saville behind her terrified at the responsibility of sharing in such great doings, gazing at Anne with round and startled eyes.

But Simonette kissed her boldly on the cheek and asked a pension for herself as queen’s woman, loyal and true to all her fortunes and now worthy to be rewarded, and Anne granted it carelessly as rich women give. It mattered nothing to her one way or another, and if it pleased Simonette well and good! All was safe now. Her condition ensured recognition within the next few months, and her only concern was that her looks should not be spoiled by the time the coronation day was fixed. London must triumph in the new Queen’s beauty.

She said to George that evening:

“Undoubtedly the Almighty hears prayer. I read in the book you gave me—‘Ask and ye shall have.’”

George smiled.

“True, but I think nothing is promised as to the consequences of these granted prayers. If we force God to give it may be that He forces His gift in our faces. I learned much in Rome of the ironies of the old gods and these humours are perhaps hereditary in the new dynasty. But I confess doctrine on these points is illogical, whether it comes from Luther or Rome. Good luck to my godson, Anne. Though I am no courtier of Heaven I wish him well through his troubles.”

Anne laughed aloud. George grew quainter daily, and so she told him.

These were times when she could almost forget the devil's marks on her body—so glorious was the triumph opening up before her. But she could not with all the waters of the oceans wash out the stain they had made, deeper than any blood-mark, upon her inmost soul.

Part Four

Chapter Nineteen

“MAY—MY lucky month. O, the glad May day!” she cried when at last the veil of secrecy swung up and disclosed her to the eyes of the world—the new Queen, the golden image with the throne for pedestal which all England was now called to worship. Katharine, dying by inches at Kimbolton Castle still protesting her Queenship, was forgotten by many in this outburst of young splendour. The Queen—and a fruitful vine to bower a man’s table, for all knew of the secret marriage and what the royal robes would cover. On that point there were boasting and rejoicing to deafen the ears. The Queen’s Household must be formed, and the lucky Boleyns and their hangers-on swarmed in it, greedy and busy as mites in a rich cheese. She must have her brother’s wife the spying Lady Rochford about her, though she and George alike detested the prowling spy, and Lady Boleyn, the spiteful aunt by marriage (now all smiles), must have her corner. Queens cannot be altogether choosers any more than beggars, but she could stuff in the crevices with the gay folk she must have about her and so make the best of it. She liked pretty faces; they garnished her rooms like posies, and the flowering rose tree need fear no rivals for herself and her buds. Therefore among the rest she had pretty Anne Saville and bold Madge Skelton and a colourless fair girl up from Wiltshire, Jane Seymour, whose brother Edward Seymour was about the Court. For reasons very mingled in quality she insisted that Mary Wyatt should be one among them and herself gave Wyatt the news. He took it gravely and his thanks were few. Yet it pleased him. She hoped it might go deeper and re-link the broken chain of her tablet and more. She had her sister Mary about her also—a thing that must be but meant little enough.

The male Boleyns also received promotion and smiled like May itself in their jocundity. Glories can always do with more, and even the grim old Duke of Norfolk felt May in his veins as it dawned to bring a queen into his family.

The coronation announced, there were a few dissentient voices but none of overpowering strength. In truth the complication of the divorce had tired out many staunch hounds on Katharine’s side, for it required a clear-headed

man indeed to steer his way among the assertions and denials of those weary years, and the average man is far from clear-headed. He likes a clear issue and a brave show with beauty and youth and the lavish spending of money, and these the new queen would provide. Then caps off and three cheers and more!

“These are my great days when the eyes of all men wait upon me,” she said to Simonette when they rose very early in the golden quiet of the May dawn to prepare for her journey from Greenwich Palace to the Tower. “Now I go to the Tower, and thence I shall come for my coronation. Never again in all my life shall men and women wonder and stare at me and lean to hear my least whisper and catch my least look as they do today. After this I shall be a queen like other queens—nothing to tell of me but the children I bear and the gay dress that sets the fashions in Europe. Do you remember, Simonette, how I came up to London to Court and turned and looked at the Tower and said I feared the look of it? But I know better now—and you were right. In its grimness it is glory, majesty, and what do the prisoners matter to the queens who live aloft and secure?”

“What indeed!” said Simonette. “Blessed Virgin, who is to harry their heart for troubles they cannot cure! And now, Anne, shall it be the pearls or the rubies today? Say I, pearls for the water! You travel by Thames; then be a water-spirit and the pearls go well with that water-green of your robe. Agreed? St. Peter!—the pride of my Lord Mayor with the King’s command to fetch you himself to the Tower!”

Passing the great window she halted.

“O, the good God, Anne! The river is alive with the noblest barges. They said each one of the great City Guilds should send a barge. Look! these are the banners of the Goldsmiths—gayest of all!—the Fishmongers, the Loriners, the Mercers—and O, gay! look at the devices on their decks! Every man pulling an oar is in scarlet! I declare not even Paris could match these London merchants. I cannot reckon their barges. But hurry—hurry! They must not wait.”

Loud music filled the air. The Lord Mayor had brought his shalms and shag-bushes with him, and he and his men disembarked and the Masters of the City Companies followed him all in scarlet cloaks and with gold chains heavy as fetters about their necks, followed in turn by the Livery men and Freemen of the City, and so proceeded towards the Palace under the frondage of glorious horse-chestnut trees holding their white torches aloft as for a festival of sunshine. And when they came the great doors were flung

open and another procession issued from them and softly onward to meet them—their Queen of May—Anne Boleyn the Queen.

She walked under a canopy of cloth of silver held aloft by six pages of noble birth wearing her colours. Her train was borne by four of her maids of honour chosen for their beauty that glittered in cloth of silver. Each upon her head wore a coronal of blossomed May, and behind them came two by two a great gathering of the noblest ladies in England. Some were absent, sorrowing for the sad forsaken Queen to whom this day must bring such bitter memories, but there were no visible empty places in the beautiful gliding ranks and who could remember to mourn in such a jocund pageant?

All eyes centred on the bride—for such she seemed in spite of all the darkened story,—so fair she paced with quiet downward looks. She was clothed in pale water-green and cloth of gold, a gold coronet with fleurs-de-lis in pearls confining the dark river of her hair as it flowed to her knees, waved softly like the sea. The greatness of the occasion—the public recognition—had paled a little the carnation of her cheeks and gave her beauty the touch of spirituality which it often missed. Used as she was to Courts, she was not used to the company of the people, and certain incidents haunting her memory—“We will not have Nan Bullen!”—set her heart beating to a quick tune. She wished for the King’s support,—but he had chosen to wait for her at the Tower. This was her great day, and she must fill it,—alone and beautiful, the eye of the peacock,—the moon dimming all stars.

She raised her eyes. The Lord Mayor was bowing before her. All were bowing. The ladies curtsying before her, like flowers in a soft breeze. She laid her hand in his that he might lead her to the splendidly canopied barge, and modesty thawed into a gentle glow of pleasure, with smiles and little quick French wavings of jewelled hands and laughters and pretty exclamations of surprise and joy.

Seated under the canopy she looked less a Queen of England (that was yet to come) than a Queen of Beauty—the fairy princess on her way to the dark Tower where all chains would fall at her smile and the grim prisons dissolve into sunset clouds and roseate gardens of everlasting fairy-tale bliss.

Her maidens, only less lovely, grouped about her while the Lord Mayor showed her the wonders prepared by the loyal city. There went in front the foist with, on the wide deck, a true fairy-tale dragon whirling and spitting wildfire into the Thames as he ramped heraldically upon his great coiled tail. Vanquished and obedient monsters of legend surrounded him, and savage

men wreathed in leaves and garlands. Ordnance shot off its thunderous welcome, and hovering near came a barge angelic bearing a mount of roses—fresh May roses about which sat maidens in white with golden hair garlanded with red roses singing the praises of the Queen. And from the mount of roses sprang a great stem of gold with red and white roses, and on it sat a white crowned falcon holding in one claw a sceptre and beneath it the proud motto which the new Queen had chosen for her own—“Me and Mine”—the red and white Rose feuds ended for ever in the offspring she would bring to the English crown.

Even the flags wore little bells which sent silver chimes over the silver water, and the silence of the waterway itself, unlike that of a road, threw up the beautiful sights and sounds, the silver blurring the gay reflections with its ripples.

She leaned back into a pose of perfectly calculated beauty and relaxed for one instant to a dream of retrospect. The struggle was ended, the peace begun. George in attendance at the Tower must own when he bent the knee to his royal sister that she had done better than well. God Himself, that dim remote incomprehensible Being seated in secure mystery above sun and moon, had set the seal of His mysterious approval upon her efforts. A mother to be, a verse of the revolutionary hymn of triumph of a greater Mother sang in her brain:

“He hath put down the mighty from their seat [Yes, Katharine and Wolsey were down]! and hath exalted the lowly and meek.” No, she had been lowly but not meek—why should she, when He had given her gifts which exalt in themselves? How calm, how secure the future! Yes, she would rule Henry now with even more decision and direct his brutalities which she could not hide from herself into the channels of more courtly manners, more mercy and consideration for the poor and needy whose loud prayers and blessings would exalt her in turn as the mainspring of mercy. There she would steal a leaf from Katharine’s book. The dove on her sceptre. She must remember that and make it impressive. And, as this dream flashed by her in a moment it mingled with the roaring guns, the Lord Mayor’s obsequious entreaty that she would notice this, that, or the other feature of loyalty. Did she observe——?

But as she smiled and bowed and waved there was one thing she did observe and sharply. The river was crowded with gaily dressed people. They leaned and stared—stared. The river was glassy with ranked eyes if one looked above its ripple, but few cheered, few shouted. Eyes consented to her beauty, they were held to it, they could not lose themselves, but scarcely one

shouted. The men did not fling up their caps. The children pointed, and the guns and bells covered the silence.

Angry red ran into her cheeks. And Henry had left her to face it alone! Was he—were they—taking it as a test? She looked back at her father's barge following hers. He was sitting looking about him with a fixed smile. She knew that expression. "Make the best of it. Pretend not to notice!" Yes—now he was really smiling and waving to a friend in a boat loaded with Boleyn partisans which followed his shouting. And to her the Lord Mayor was speaking again. She smiled quickly, laughed, fluttered her feather fan sparkling with jewels, and wished the rowers could pull harder against the swift current and set her down within the great water-gate of the Tower. That triumph had been seasoned with bitterness. The next would be pure honey.

The Tower roaring its savage welcome in great guns—the Tower that nothing could shock into gaiety, gaunt and grim and thunderous, stood with open jaws to receive her. Each stroke of the oars more clearly disclosed the glittering group in readiness to meet the Queen. Henry, dazzling the sunshine in jewels and gold, talking familiarly over his shoulder with George and Surrey, only less splendid. The chamberlains and heralds and all the pomp that was the food of her soul, all were waiting as her barge glided swan-like to the postern gate by the water stairs, and here indeed a shout was raised that chorded with the guns as Henry took her hand and kissed her in face of all the world in welcome before she turned the whole battery of her graces upon the Lord Mayor to thank him and the City for its great and noble welcome. It seemed as though all the world had crowded to towers and roofs and every point of vantage—teeming black with human life to see and to hear, and yet—how silent in the intervals when the hoarse guns paused for breath!

But Henry led her into the grim royal rooms in the very heart of England's power. Heavy groined rooms with dark passages and mute dangerous stairs hidden in the thickness of the walls and a haunted chapel contrived in the dark recesses of mountainous stone hewn as by goblins into stern arches and altars for the celebration of midnight masses for souls that cannot be at peace. Grey, ancient,—they had tricked it all out with bright hangings and chairs of state and cushions and the like, but it was they that had become phantasmal, the Tower itself remained steadfastly terrible, refusing all compliance as surely as the inmost grey heart of a mountain shut into its own secrets.

But Anne exulted. That was her chair of state side by side with Henry's. Ascending its step she stood a moment and looked down on those about her,

down even upon the King who had handed her to it—she stood royally in the glory of flowing gold and glory of hair.

And glory of glorious face most fair—

and she had bent even the implacable Tower to be her slave to do her pleasure.

Wyatt, standing a little back, no longer a constant visitor to those coveted hours of her intimacy, read her thoughts perhaps more clearly than in swift dazzle she could read them herself, and strangely perhaps his emotion was neither sympathy nor grief at her removal into the heaven of royalty, but pity. He had known her too long to believe it could satisfy her for ever. Already he had noted the onslaught of weariness and sick distaste. George had the seeker hidden in him under all the mockery. Anne had the discontent that may be the source of spiritual adventure in some far distance. This was a drunken dream. The wine would dry in the cups, the grey dawn rise in accusing skies and then—— But no, this drunkenness may last a lifetime and defy all but death's cold awakening. Verses of his own written to her wandered in his brain as he looked up to the gracious figure poised above them in flowing gold.

*What should I say
Since Faith is dead,
And Truth away
From you is fled?
Should I be led
With doubleness?
Nay—nay, mistress!*

Snatches of it besieged him—a lost melody.

*But since I see
Your double heart——*

Double—had she a heart at all? See how she smiles when Henry casts the flaunting look of proud possession upon her! It was Wyatt's turn now to kneel and kiss her hand. He did not look upward as he knelt, but as he pressed his lips on the fingers there was a fluttering response invisible but certain to a lover. The false coquette, who could not even be true to the King who had given her all! He drew back and looked, and her face was a mere flutter of smiles for the next comer, but he had felt. He knew. The woman could not be true if she tried, and she never would try. In that moment he hated her and thought with joy of the brief triumph, the bitter masque of Beauty with the shadow of Age always at her shoulder.

*May chance thee lie, withered and old,
In winter nights that are so cold,
Plaining in vain unto the moon.
Thy wishes then dare not be told.
Care then who list! for I have done.*

He turned on his heel, yet must return to watch her glory. Gird at her and rebel he must, yet always she held him.

She took a few days' rest at the Tower before the coronation and, after her way, made it ring with riotous merriment, and Wyatt was gay among the gayest. He would have rather died than that she should guess his pain. Did George—his oldest friend—suspect it?

They stood side by side one evening, stiff as painted images in their stiff Court splendours, and watched her a-glitter with diamonds leaning forward from the King's side to applaud a masque headed by Mark Smeaton as Sylvanus—a woodland god whose part suited him to the letter. They had contrived furry hoofs for him and a furry cap with high pointed ears, and his ugly fascination as of a gnarled tree glittered beneath it as he danced with strange sidelong motions and stealthy leaps and darting pounces upon the nymphs of his train. The masque was "May in the Greenwood," and it rang strangely in his beautiful voice in the ponderous prison of the Tower. The two watchers saw Anne's eyes dilate upon him as he took his lute and sang:

*"In summer when the glades are sheen
And leaves are large and long,
It is full merry in fair forest
To hear the wild birds' song,*

*"To see the deer draw to the dale
And leave the hills on high,
And shadow him in the leaves so green
Under the greenwood by.*

*" 'Tis a merry morning,' said Little John.
'By Him that died on tree!
A more merry man than I am one
Lives not in Christentie!*

*" 'Pluck up thy heart, my master dear'
Little John did sing and say,
'And think it is a full fair time
In a golden morn of May.'"*

His voice had the freshness of spring. It was inspiration, and Henry rose with a hunting shout that waked the echoes down the vaulted rooms and

shattered against the windows, and the men yelled with him and the women laughed with glee and clapped their hands and Anne's eyes held Smeaton until silence came and he sang again—a song of wild pursuit and amorous capture, and Wyatt said to himself but not so softly that George did not hear:

“I hate that man. The Tower dungeons are deep but none deep enough for him.”

George looked at him.

“And why? I do not love Smeaton, but he is a man that women cannot hate. They do not know a gentleman when they see him nor miss that element in Smeaton, and he gives them the only escape back to nature that our Court women can ever secure. They dance in the woods with him at night when he sings. He is their sorcerer—their warlock. Look at their faces!”

It was true that they all gazed with passionate earnestness at the man as he twirled and spun, clashing wild cymbals now above his head, half beast, half god. His own eyes claimed each in turn but Anne's most as she leaned her chin on her hand and her elbow on her knee watching his every motion.

“George,” said Wyatt with sudden earnestness, “Anne should dismiss the beast. He is no man.”

“It might be well,” he answered with studied carelessness, “I believe I have said as much to her;—but why so earnest?”

They were standing apart in a great stone embrasure like the yawning mouth of a cave, and Wyatt spoke safely:

“Because there is something in her soul that responds to his. When he pipes she dances. No—I mean no harm. I scarcely know what I mean. But queens must not dance even in heart when Smeatons play. He is a danger.”

“And what is not a danger for a queen?” asked George. “She wanted it and she has got it and we also have filled our pockets, but God knows we were happier in the sunny days at Blickling. ‘What is this world? What asken men to have?’ ” He ended with his favourite quotation from Chaucer, and Wyatt sighed. Strange talk for a Queen's coronation! Yet it came from the two men who in all that gay throng loved her best—each in his own strange way. She called Mark Smeaton and sitting by the King detached a small jewel from her glittering dress and handed it to him with a “Well done, Mark,” and the King added some careless praise, and Sylvanus slipped back and was lost, but all that night he capered none the less through Wyatt's dreams and through the Queen's as she lay folded securely in the great arms of the King, heavily snoring after his debauch on rich wines and meats. It

was her escape—George had understood better than Wyatt. George's mind was nearer to hers even than the poet's who loved her.

It was the same next day when Smeaton, his beautiful body moulded in silver mail as Mercury, led the Masque of the Rivers come to do homage to their queen. It was an age of poetry, and not an eye wavered from him as with a clear sonority he chanted the invocation, his wand extended:

*"I am come
To celebrate the long-wished nuptials
Here in Olympus which are now performed
Between two goodly Rivers which have mixed
Their gently rising waves and are to grow
Into a thousand streams great as themselves.
I summon up with my all-charming voice
The nymphs of rivers and of flowing streams.
Rise from your wells!"*

All-charming most truly! As he extended his rod the nymphs of Thames, Severn, and Dee with all their silver-footed sisters rose from their several fountains in robes of sea-green bubbled with crystal, their golden locks garlanded with water lilies. And to meet them descended from above the nymphs of the rain apparelled in sky-colour each with a fair star on her forehead, and so to his leading they danced a measure to string-music of perfect loveliness and all prostrated themselves before her in homage. And again Wyatt noted, but this time silently, how the very blood in her veins thrilled to the beauty of the man's face speaking through all its fascinating ugliness, and responded like a harmonic to its fellow-note.

But she could think neither of that nor of anything but her pomps on the day before her coronation. That was marked by her progress through London. The Queen born unroyal must not be disgraced by memories of the last Queen who was to the manner born and royal without help from her husband! Through the pageants in Fenchurch Street and the interminable courtesies of Gracechurch Street she rode in her litter of cloth of gold shot with white, supported by white horses draped in white damask. All silver and ermine she shone, riding like a saint in a shrine. Rubies bound her blowing hair, and waving and bowing, smiling incessantly until the little muscles about her mouth dragged with the strain, she passed through the crowd. An angel flew down and set a gold coronal upon her head above the band of rubies. Would it spoil the brow-bound effect which she and Simonette had so carefully contrived? She wished it had been a bracelet instead. She never forgot herself for a moment. Always it was Anne as in a looking-glass presented to her eyes. She calculated—and had practised the

curve of the smile she bestowed on each. They must all think it lovely—they must say it lit her up into royally condescending graciousness. All was self-conscious to her finger-tips, but art concealing art till it looked the very spontaneity of nature.

So it was even in the dim and glorious Abbey at her coronation, with jewelled haloed saints looking down from the high windows upon her mortal splendour. Now she wore no carefully chosen dress but the historic pomp of purple velvet lined with ermine which must be borne away from her body by the Duchess of Norfolk or she could not have advanced a step for its weight.

The day was all her own. Henry remained an obscure spectator, and it was for her that the bishops collected and marched in hieratic splendour, for her that the Earl of Arundel bore her ivory rod with the dove of mercy perched upon it (Yes, she must look like a saint, eyes drooped or raised sometimes to heaven accompanied by joined pointed fingers!), for her that the Lord High Chamberlain bore the Crown (then she must carry her head imperially—something between a goddess and a queen. People must be made to feel it). For her that London and Winchester in the persons of their bishops walked beside her supporting the lappets of her gorgeous robe. But even her pomp must prostrate itself before the High Altar, and as she lay there, cruciform arms outspread, Cranmer spoke the appointed collects over her and raised her while a lady opened her royal mantle that he might anoint her on the breast with the oil of consecration and on the head where the sacred crown of St. Edward the Confessor must rest. (For this, her expression must be one of divine and composed serenity!) And so, after prayers many and great, he placed the heavy crown upon her head, and in either hand he set a sceptre—in one the rod with the spiritual dove and in the other the sceptre of royal rule. And with that the choir took up the strain and carried it to heaven in waves of harmony—a mighty *Te Deum* breaking like the ocean against windows and glorious roofs and the tombs of bygone kings while she sat stiffly, crowned, sceptred, the acknowledged Queen of England at last.

Even the music could not storm her away from herself. Could it be she—she who had played in the Blickling meadows her head crowned with daisy chains,—she who had lain— No, no, not that! Storms of quick thought and emotion shattered and flashed in her brain, flying signals to past or future,—but these were behind the scenes. On the stage she sat crowned, a noble calm on untroubled brows encircled with the crown which had sanctified her predecessors.

It ended. Cranmer relieved her of its weight and set in its place the light and graceful crown made by the King's goldsmiths. Now she must receive the Eucharist and pray. (It must be obvious to all present that she prayed in truth.) Then she must make her golden offering, and at last all was over and the procession arranged itself and her father supported her sceptre hand on the one side and Lord Talbot on the other, and the consecrated Queen emerged from the Abbey and rested herself until the great banquet in Westminster Hall, still lily-like, sweet, and conscious, not only that she had played her part to admiration, but that it had been recognized as a piece of pure beauty by those who had eyes to see.

The banquet—a sounding coloured spectacle in the noble old hall of the kings. The highest nobles of England to perform the table service about her. Wyatt, silent and grave, to pour scented water upon her hands in a golden basin. (Yes, she had done right to secure Mary Wyatt as one of her women. It had pleased him, and she was a kind sweet-natured fidelity, all said and done. And honest as the day.) And the Countesses of Oxford and Winchester stood on duty holding a fine cloth before her in case she had need to clear her throat. And she was the golden Image set up for all to worship, and Henry, the head worshipper, watched from a little latticed closet and thought that no other woman in the world could bear herself so queenly yet so sweetly.

And so she thanked them all “full graciously,” her silver voice dominating the silence, and to the Lord Mayor she gave a great standing golden cup, thanking him and the City for their worship, and presently the mass of colour broke into dividing streams of scarlet and gold and blue as—like the little figures in an ancient illuminated missal—all flowed away into the darkness and silence of the starred night, looking down incuriously upon the pinnacles and spires of wearied London.

The King led the Queen by the hand ceremoniously to their chamber and then gathered her into his arms.

“Were you content, sweetheart? Have I kept my word? Have they all danced to the tune I played—from the Pope down to the lowest beggar in London streets that cheered as you went by as beautiful as God's Mother?”

“Yes, my heart,—but they did not cheer,” she said half fearfully. “We can make them dance to our tune, but we cannot make them cheer. The most stared stupidly—as at a travelling show. There was no heart in it.”

She struck the wrong note. He wanted thanks, thanks, and praise, praise for the wonders accomplished. The sullen look knotted his brows.

“If you are not satisfied——” She saw the danger instantly and skirted it with a flood of glorification. None but he could have done it. None could stand up against him—not the Pope, not——

“But I must have his assent to my marriage,” he said heavily. “Neither you nor I nor the child can do without it, and I must find his price and take him at his own bidding now. O, the affair is not done yet! A man pays for his whistle, and I shall pay dear. Not that I grudge it, God knows. A son is more to me than anything in heaven and earth saving only my conscience and the Almighty’s approval. But do not run riot, sweetheart. Do not sound your trumpets too loud and free. We must not let the world think we affront my brother’s widow more than needs be. That woman has the resolution to take the field with Mary for a banner, if I drive her to the last ditch. No—no. Our troubles lie ahead as well as behind us, but my son will save us from the English crop and give even Rome pause. Only, be wary!”

She could not sleep that night. Colour and sound blazed in her eyes and ears—the surging triumph of the choirs. The “Cherubim and Seraphim continually do cry—‘Holy, Holy, Holy!’” and the Crown of King Edward, and her father’s wizened twitching face, and the half-frightened eyes of her girls clustering about her. A maze of feverish excitement and cries and guns and drums, and Smeaton dancing wilder in goblin woods, and behind it all the King’s voice, “You must be wary—wary.”

One may wear the Crown of St. Edward and yet be the slave of the Nature of Things—which never changes. One may wreath one’s throat with jewels, but the mark beneath abides.

Chapter Twenty

BUT when the springtide of the coronation noise and splendour began to ebb that ebb was in proportion to its height and glitter, and the old familiar rocks were disclosed with obscene creatures of the depths busy about them. There towered the rock of St. Peter jagged and dangerous as ever. There were the reef of the Emperor's enmity and the quicksands of Katharine's stern determination to die Queen of England. There was the uncovered bar of the English people's detestation of Nan Bullen and all her ways and their mulish resolve that Mary and Mary alone must be heiress of England until a brother should rightfully supersede her.

No doubt that situation would be solved, but meanwhile life was troublous, and executions as a means of criticism had not that calming touch upon the public mind which kings have a right to expect. Briefly, Henry found himself with his old problems much inflamed by his action in marrying and crowning Anne. He had sent ambassadors to the various European courts announcing these achievements, and what was the result? Pope Clement with exasperating want of consideration annulled Archbishop Cranmer's annulment of Henry's marriage with Katharine, thus reverting to the old miserable tangle, and not content with this thrust put forth a bull excommunicating both Henry and Anne unless they separated. And this in July with the birth of the Prince of Wales expected in September! What is the use of having a sensitive conscience in a world dominated by such cruel irreverence for scruples? Propped by the certainty of Rome's action priests in the English pulpit uprose to fulminate against the King as a man of detestable carnality who must be summoned to disuse his light o' love and return to his lawful wife. Their courage was amazing. Actually in the presence of Henry and Anne the lean dark Friar Peto, pouncing with flying sleeves above them in his pulpit, compared them to Ahab and Jezebel and warned Henry that the dogs would lick his blood in the open places if he defied Heaven and Rome as he was doing now. And this to a man whose conscience had already brought upon him a very martyrdom! The ten plagues of Egypt were as nothing to the plague of tongues, decrees, and letters raining in upon him. He could find peace nowhere but in eating and

drinking and roistering with Anne and her chosen companions, and even into those gay gatherings the “stink,” as he called it, of public opposition would intrude and gather to a black and filthy cloud choking comfortable mirth.

Domestic troubles too. Mary Boleyn, the family idiot, for so Henry saw her though the eyes of Anne and George, must needs weary of the unsafety of besieged widowhood and fling herself into the arms of Sir William Stafford, whose title was more imposing than his purse. She was writing begging letters to Anne, and failing the adamant Anne to Cromwell whose granite heart she moved as much as a blade of grass gently tickling it moves a mountain. As thus, in her plaintive strain:

MASTER SECRETARY,

After my poor recommendation which is little to be regarded from a poor banished creature, this is to desire you to be good to my poor husband and me for it is not unknown to you the high displeasure I have from the King’s Highness and the Queen’s Grace by reason of our marriage without their knowledge. Good Master Secretary, sue for us to the King’s Highness and beseech his Highness that it will please him of his goodness to speak to the Queen’s Grace for us, for I perceive her Grace is so highly displeased with us both that unless the King be so good Lord for us as to sue for us we are never likely to recover her Grace’s favour, which is too heavy to bear. For God’s sake help us, for we have now been married a quarter of a year, I thank God, and too late now to recall that again. But if I were at my liberty and might choose, I assure you, Master Secretary, I had rather beg my bread with him than be the greatest queen christened.

Mary all over!—the incurable sentimentalist always surrendering to the implacable needs of the flesh without a thought for the morrow! To Anne’s fire-tempered steel, cold as ice but with a surface glitter of romance, it appeared positively revolting. Henry scowled the letter down with unprintable language when Anne tendered it with a blighting sarcasm. He began to feel himself Boleyn-ridden,—fatal symptom of a flaw in the pure crystal of the marriage-cup of bliss! Yes, those silvery cobwebs more resistant than a battleship’s cables were entangling him daily more and more with the clan. Things seemed to have an almost religious bias to their advantage. He certainly had not desired that his illegitimate son Henry Duke of Richmond should marry among them, but before he knew where he was

the boy was married to old Norfolk's daughter—Anne's cousin—another slender strand flung about his own neck. And no portion with her!—Anne had seen to that. Her good heart was a little over-faithful to her friends, said Henry moodily to Cromwell, and it would be better if the Queen were to look twice at the private characters of the ladies for whom she wished to provide as abbesses and prioresses. To be a Boleyn favourite was not necessarily a passport to the Kingdom of Heaven as represented by high Church offices. Public scandals,— But Cromwell smiled indulgently and slid past the subject. September was drawing on, and the mother of the Prince of Wales might do what she would. For a season! But his inward smile was not indulgent. She was thrusting herself into all his departments—Church preferment, Parliamentary interest,—all and sundry must pass through her hands to be successful. She exulted in her pride of power and the bowing cringing suppliants. Since her coronation a haughty arrogance had broken out of hiding. George who knew her to the bone believed it was one way of testifying her galling fear of the existence of Katharine—the true Queen and by far her most dangerous opponent. But possession is nine points of the law, and Anne pulled the strings of power. She went splendid and courted, and yet the legend grew and grew of the sad Queen in the lonely Castle of Kimbolton writing patient noble letters to her desolate daughter, watering her prayers with tears, yet holding steadfastly to her wifedom as God's gift not to be disparaged for any earthly advantage.

They sent her papers wherein she was to acknowledge herself Princess Dowager, papers accompanied by threats and bribing promises for her alternatives,—and she seizing her pen drew a black line through the inferior title and rising to confront them cowed them royally as Anne could never do. What was the impalpable fire which flashed from her which the younger and beautiful woman could not command? Whatever it was it moved the hearts of all but Henry to veneration,—and he even trembled before it and felt himself arraigned at a bar higher than that of the conscience he thrust in men's faces.

“I would rather be a poor beggar's wife and sure of Heaven than Queen of all the world and stand in doubt of it by my own consent. I do not stick for vainglory but because I know myself to be the King's true wife. I came not into his realm as merchandise to be transferred to any other nor do I continue in it except as his lawful wife,—not as a subject to live under his dominion otherwise! If I were to agree to your persuasions I should slander myself and confess to having been the King's harlot for twenty-four years. The cause was determined here within the King's realm by a man of his own making, the Bishop of Canterbury, no impartial person. As for the

impartiality of the place, I think the place would have been more impartial had it been judged in hell, for no truth is endured here.”

Henry groaned for impotent fury when he heard her gallant words and the queenly dismissal she gave his offers. Anne sat staring at him hardly—her arrogance did not spare even the King now that she was secure in the saddle.

“And you will bear this woman’s insolence! And you call yourself King!”

“What a man cannot remedy he must bear!” he answered thickly. “I have no remedy.”

“What? You that have her daughter in your hands! The man that holds the child has the mother’s heart in his grip. He can stick his finger-nails in it.”

They stared at each other.

“But she is *my* daughter also!” he said at long last, dropping his eyes to his hands, jewelled and swollen into unwholesome whiteness.

“And what matter is that? If a king cannot take order with his own daughter he is no king but a knave!”

He started to his feet and glared at her.

“What? You—you——”

She retorted proudly.

“You have threatened your brother’s widow, and she mocks at your threats. She knows you have not the bowels to carry them through.”

“She shall know better. And you too!” He hobbled from the room leaning on his staff. His leg was angry that day,—and he passed George in the ante-chamber grinning with pain and without so much as seeing him. George came in presently and found Anne the Queen sobbing at the table.

“And what is the matter?” asked he.

“The matter? That always and ever that woman worsts me! I am no true queen while she lives. And it is for her sake he has first cast a look at me that——”

She fell to sobbing again. George set down much to her condition, for September was drawing near, but that did not still the fear at his heart. They must thank Heaven for her pregnancy for it was what had set her where she was, and yet to George’s eye, more feminine than masculine in its swift intuition, it was the beginning of the end. It evoked no tenderness in Henry from the man to the woman but only a fierce jealousy of every breath she

drew lest it should injure the precious deposit committed to her charge. But she was the guardian of *his* treasure, not of theirs. Supposing any miserable accident—— George dared not consider it. Sexually, he could not value her at the moment. It had destroyed her grace and pinched her beauty. Things were evolving that terrified him when he dared let his thoughts range free. Long ago he had told Wyatt, sighing for Anne's tarnished beauty, that marriage is the sure antidote to love "who dies by what he feeds on," and most surely he felt it in the gross familiarity which Henry exercised with his wife and which steadily and surely bred contempt instead of content. He analyzed it to himself as Henry never could and believed it incurable.

"She has not the art or the dignity to withhold any of herself—so that there is an undiscovered country left for him to explore. She knows herself mapped out, sounded and bounded, and her master sitting sullenly in the middle—a prisoner because what he thought limitless beyond the horizon is but a little island all said and done. It is the curse of women in marriage—men's curse also and she cannot escape it. And now her beauty is spoilt.—Pray God she may recover it!"

Wyatt had argued but agreed there was no remedy, adding seriously:

"George, if I dare say so, I think her Grace does herself little good with the King by abuse of his wife and daughter. He does not spare them himself, but for another to touch them—— Even if he wishes both dead he will have vengeance on the tongue that wounds, the hand that strikes. Men are a mixture of the devil and God—a breed between the sheep and the goat; and he that rebukes the goat in them, especially in kings, will find no favour. Treat the King as God's own sheep dyed white in the wool, then let him loose unchecked and he will deal the tiger's ripping blow even while bleating of mercy. Let Anne take him that way and he will do for her enemies as she herself would have them done by. But to face him with himself is madness."

Those words were in George's mind as he found her sobbing, those and the fear of her changed face—dragged and sallow and red-eyed, the figure distorted. Like most women of the intellectual type, she took that physical disablement hard, and suffering much in her health could not hide her miseries and play her old part of the King's jester. It awakened George's pity as much as his fear.

"Anne, you torment yourself into madness!" he said with serious quiet. "If you want to play your enemy's game for her, then cry yourself into red blotches, storm at her, storm at the King, make yourself his scourge instead of his secret joy and so——"

“So what?” she said starting up fiercely and dashing away the wet hair from her eyes.

“So make yourself what the Queen was—a jailer to bind him, a spur to goad him, a barred window with the free country outside which he may see but never run abroad in. And if so——”

“If so—what?” She leaned one hand on the table with a red angry spot in either cheek. Her chin was sharpened, the nostrils pinched. Hard indeed to believe this was the beauty that had set Europe aflame!

“If so, the same and worse. For the Queen——”

“The Queen——?” Her tone was distilled fury. George continued quietly:

“The Princess Dowager.—She has great relations in Europe, but what are we? Men of straw the King made and can unmake. She never cost him a trouble in his life until your light put hers out. She is the woman England honours. Ask yourself else! And——”

But she turned on him like a wildcat—almost spitting at him.

“But with all that and more—if it were twice as much, and with all the saints to back her, she cannot face me and my son. That was her crime. That will be my innocence, my beauty, my godliness, my every worth. It will be God’s smile upon me, and who in England dare touch me? My son!”

It came out of her with such fire that it shook her, and she sank half exhausted in her chair throwing her head back against the crimson cushion. George was silent. He had not the heart to word his thought—“And if it should not be a son?”—that was his own daily terror. He tried another issue.

“Well—and the son will need a mother well with the world. For his sake I beseech you be merciful to the Queen and the Princess Mary——”

The very names rekindled the fierce spark in her.

“—Mary! I will break the proud spirit in her and teach it to crawl and lick her father’s feet and mine before I have done with her. She to set herself up to judge and shrink away from me! I would do her good if she would behave herself, but if not let her bear the brunt. The Princess Dowager’s household is to be broken up because her fools of servants will persist in calling her Queen, and we will try what turn of the screw on the daughter will make the whole nest of them sing another song.”

It was as though the very blood in her ran bitter. She could not restrain her tongue among her men and women and mocked and taunted at that fallen greatness until all but the basest of those who heard her and sought to curry favour wondered in secret. George knew it was as much the nervous

agony of her condition and the years of strain and fear as the taint in her nature, but who else made allowance? Norfolk and even her father, scenting danger in her dangerous unpopularity, began to measure their flatteries and the humouring of her whims. And her wild words flew abroad over England like the feathered darts of noxious weeds, and the French Ambassador reported them, and the Emperor's man wrote that her will was to poison both the Queen and the Princess and walk to safety over their corpses. And yet all the time she was broken down in the decency of self-control and should have been secluded and humoured like a lunatic until the releasing birth-pangs set her sane again. None the less the danger was acute.

For on the other hand Katharine to England and the world was showing the example of a very noble patience. Her household broken up, her long-trusted servants forced from her, she spoke to Sir Edmund Bedingfeld the intermediary and pleaded for them and herself in words that were repeated over England and touched every heart that heard them.

“My physician and apothecary are my countrymen; the King knows them as well as I. They have continued many years with me and have (I thank them) taken great pains with me. They are faithful and diligent in my service and daily do they pray that the King's royal estate may long endure. Wherefore I trust the King of his high honour and goodness and for the great love that hath been between him and me (which love in me is now as faithful as ever it was, so I take God to record it) will not use extremity with me, my request being so reasonable.”

Even Anne dared not press nor Henry execute the severance of those two men from her desolation. It would be said that the intention of gradually poisoning her was the real reason for their removal. Anne could not drive him there though she could thrust a sword into Katharine's heart in other and safer ways. And yet there too it rebounded on them. They could seize and torture her confessor in Newgate Prison, but they could not prevent the beautiful letter he wrote to his mistress from circulation among the people who wept and feared God in reading it.

Not only did your letter infinitely comfort me but it excited in me patience and joy. Christ Jesus give you, daughter and Lady of mine, above all mortal delights (which are of brief continuance) the joy of His divine presence for evermore. Remember me in your most fervent prayers; pray that I may fight the battle to which I am called. Would it become these hoary locks to give way in aught that concerns God's glory? But as to you, Lady mine and daughter in Christ, sincerely beloved, in life and death I will think

of you and pray God in His mercy to send you from heaven consolation according to the greatness of your sorrows. I send your Majesty for consolation in your prayers my rosary, for they tell me that of my life but three days remain.

His torture was to last longer and to end horribly by fire, but meanwhile the friends of the Queen circulated his letter as well they might in many copies. And it came like a strain of pure music over the riot of the fight.

“Look at this!” said George, palely displaying it to Wyatt, “and say if we are not on the losing side! Say also if we do not earn it. Man, there are many sorts of beauty—I know it who have run the gamut of all, and this is beauty that stirs alike the lowest and the highest. And Beauty is mistress of the hearts of men. Is she on our side? No—no! We have the beauty of Anne’s fading face. I know no other. A frippery of verses here and there, saving your presence! The very masques and mumming with which we wormed ourselves into favour are more than half dead since she wearied of mumming. I think reality ousts mumming in the end, though once we swore by it. We said Art was all and life nothing, but I think life has the last word in the argument, and perhaps there is something beyond that has the Amen.”

He spoke with concentrated bitterness. Wyatt sighed. His heart was not free from Anne yet—his wife most certainly did not hold it, but it was as though they walked with a widening river between. He saw her a lessening figure as it flowed toward the sea. Had they once held hands?—“Dear heart, how like you this?”—Unbelievable! She was utterly changed;—only at times there swam to the surface of the deep dark wave a flying glimmer of the dying light that once had been his sun. It was easier to stay away than to see her.

“I write few verses now,” he said. “They have taken wing for Arcadia. Only I remember!—*Et ego in Arcadia vixi!* The past cannot be recalled. But pluck up your heart, George. She holds the King’s heart. He has made immeasurable sacrifices for her.”

“The more to fling in her face when the time comes,” said George moodily. “And, Thomas, I say to you what I say to no other. Anne is no Queen. The only part she has failed to play to the top of her bent. For myself I cannot think she looks it. She is always the Court beauty mumming as the Fairy Queen and missing the royalty. And for words and manners—look at the changed Court! Gross and lustful it was always. Gross and lustful it is, but did ever a loose word or jest come into the Queen’s presence? No.—It is a bachelor court now for all a woman is at its head. I heard Mark Smeaton tell Madge a story the other day before Anne’s face—and I could have

struck him on the foul mouth. But she smiled, playing with her dog's ears. I say my mind but she cannot see. And her follies make the Queen's cause God's and hers the great devil's and even the wickedest would as soon patronize God if it costs them nothing, and so they rank behind the Queen. I wish we knew the end!"

"September comes on," Wyatt said as cheerily as he could, for of the two he loved George better than Anne now, "and my sister Mary is much about Anne, though I do not say she is the chief favourite, and she tells me all will be well when Anne is delivered. How can men know a woman's trouble? Mary says it is a passing cloud and our Anne of Hever will return to us."

George shook his head.

September was indeed near, and great preparations were making for the tremendous event of the birth. The Privy Council had a circular prepared for sending about the Kingdom and to European Courts. It ran in the name of Queen Anne and announced that a prince had been born to her. Bad luck, thought Mark Smeaton and others, to tempt the Fates by anticipating their decrees. But whatever the issue might be surely the King's heart was hers. He had put her initial on the coinage with his own—the first Queen-Consort to glitter in gold and silver in the hands of her faithful subjects. The whole nation stared at it. Whose seat was ever securer? And yet——

The hour struck—the hour of a long and most dangerous labour. She took it hard as she took all else. And outside her courtiers snatched what rest they could, and the King went and came sullen and irritable to breaking-point with the cruel suspense. Suppose she were to die and take the boy with her! The doctors' grave faces warned him. He had asked the King of France to be godfather and he had agreed in all good brotherhood,—but now—the terror of death that regards no kings or princes was on Henry—and the future daunted him. He caught up his beads and prayed—a son,—a son!—his only petition. For the mother he forgot to pray. A son.

He sat in one of the deep windows and gazed vaguely at the tapestry of the Ten Virgins which hung the ancient walls. The wise, the foolish,—he was counting them unconsciously, recounting;—the fools to leave their lamps unlit!—when a cry, a new voice startled his ears. His child. His son. He rose and stood, clutching a drapery, his heart beating in his throat.

"My son."

An old woman made to him from the group about Anne,—the doctors too busy to turn, her puffed cheeks flushed and quivering with excitement.

“A noble child, your Grace—healthy and like to live, and as like your Grace as two peas and——”

He cut her short.

“My son?”

“No, no, your Grace—a lovely princess. A very jewel. A very——”

He turned abruptly away from her and stared from the window speechless. The vigil of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, and it had sent him another daughter.

It seemed hours before a weak voice from the bed with restrained weeping in it called him. Anne’s. Bleached with agony she lay broken on her pillows, enduring a greater mental agony than that which had rent her and left her half dead.

“A girl, my own, my beloved,” she said feeling blindly for his fingers. “But see! This is the vigil of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, and on this happy day is born a virgin in this Chamber of the Virgins that shall make England rejoice.”

She could say no more. Her voice died away in utter faintness, and he stumbled out of the room, leaving her to the dull dream of exhaustion that tortured nature sinks into as gently as into the last long sleep. For awhile she had forgotten, but Henry must face the world a conquered man. They added an *s* to the word “prince” in the circulars and sent the bad news abroad. In his ears rang the muffled growl of the people—“A girl? And in what is she better than the Princess Mary?—Or as good? Nan Bullen’s daughter! God’s judgment on their sin!” And could it be God’s judgment? Was there any truth in the story of the writhings of pretended conscience before offended Godhead? He did not know. For the moment the world was too much for him. He felt himself the fool of Europe.

When she regained her health, but not the full glamour of her beauty, she urged him on again, and perhaps the pride of defiance urged him with her. They called the child Elizabeth after his lovely mother the White Rose of York who had married the grandson of Tidder and conferred royalty on their line. The servile Parliament entailed the succession on the baby to the exclusion of her illegitimate elder sister. Unless a brother should be born they certified her Queen of England. Also they baptized her in blood as well as consecrated water—though that was an informal part of the programme.

If Henry had hoped that Sir Thomas More and Bishop Fisher would sign and seal that slur on Queen Katharine and on the true Head of their Church he was mistaken. Anne had never hoped it—rather otherwise. She had felt

those two men to be silent protests against her Queendom and all her assumptions. Silent hitherto, but now they spoke and to some purpose. Sign, they could not. Take the oath they could not. More had been Lord Chancellor, Fisher the most spiritual of the Bishops. They were sent to the Tower. It made a great noise in England and the world.

“I cannot slay them,” Henry said to Anne. “It will ring over Europe. Some way—some way must be found. O, for Wolsey to counsel me! You have killed all my men!”

“And kneel to Rome and throw scorn on the birth of your true daughter!” she said, her lips set in a thin line in her pale face. “There is no turning back, and this will teach a lesson.—You cannot spare them—you dare not.”

It is probable that of all men in the civilized world Thomas More was the most beloved and venerated. There was not a court in Europe where any living man could believe that with his own hands Henry could pluck such a jewel from his crown and hurl it in the dust of death. Yet in her madness of panic, for it had grown to madness in her agony of disappointment, Anne still urged him. Nor could Henry himself see another way out of the labyrinth in which she had involved him. We make our deeds from our thoughts into actuality that they may be our masters and ride us at last to death.

More was executed. They set his head on London Bridge. They beheaded the old Bishop, gentle and ripe for Heaven, and Anne could sleep the safer in her bed. So at least she believed—believed it even when as she sat at chess with Henry, delicately contriving his winning of the game in which her skill so far excelled his, the news was brought that Thomas More was dead by the axe. There was an awful pause. She tried to smile. But with his great hand he swept the kings, queens, and bishops from the board, and they scattered on the floor.

“You are the cause of this man’s death,” he glared at her, and went out roughly aflame within, shutting himself in his room and denying her entrance when she beat at the door.

It rang indeed through Europe. The Emperor cried aloud on hearing it. “Had we been master of such a servant we would rather have lost the fairest city in our dominions than such a counsellor.”

Katharine wept in her solitudes for her lost friends. The world was the poorer and knew it. But Henry, lost in the storm of his own sensations, for thoughts it would be impossible to call them, tormented himself because Europe would say madness had seized him—that he had become a woman’s

fool and a woman's who could not even fulfil the first and most primitive duty of giving him the son he craved for. Was he not the dog who had dropped the substance for its shadow in water? Well—a little more time! She was still a habit. She might still give him a son. If Katharine died then the hatred in the country might abate. He calmed himself somewhat, but it was observable that where there had been the bull-like certainty that drove him ahead horns down in the teeth of his enemies, he now stood hesitating, doubting himself, doubting her, a storm of ifs whirling about his head, not king but the sport of circumstance. And in her own eyes he read doubt and fear. He needed the consolations of a secret woman—the atmosphere where he could embrace and be lulled and forget—forget. It was rest to get away from Anne and the perpetual problems of which she was the source and continuance. Rest to forget the wife! He began to say with Adam—

“The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me——”

Yes, she was the temptress—the Eve who had lost him Paradise. But she might yet bear his son and rebuild the vanished Eden—with a few ulterior consolations for himself which she would never dare to hinder.

And outside the people shouted and the women whispered to each other in their little shut rooms:

“We will not have Nan Bullen or her bastard. She is a witch. She bears the devil's marks in her body. She hides her left hand for it is a claw, and her throat bulges with his apple that she ate. Away with her!”

The ripples of the storm beat against the palace.

Chapter Twenty-one

WEARINESS and fear are terrible companions to hold either hand, and gaolers when the victim must play the antic to amuse the master on whom her all hangs. And the growing terror was that Henry was becoming unamusable, at least by her. She became *disease* or “disar” again, recited, told new stories resembling those which had once charmed all thought from his irritated brain and lulled him as a man sitting by a running stream falls into a dreamy ecstasy. It was his form of opium. But now, whether receptivity was dulled either with long nervestrain or with years, he had dropped below the slightest intellectual appeal and reverted to the primitive instincts. And in those she could appeal to him no longer. George’s fear was verified. Anne had become a habit—and a dull wifely one. In this they reacted on one another. How could she be charming when every look of his rejected her as charmless? How can a flower open but in sunshine? And why should the sun shine when there is no beauty to welcome him? The eternal problem and tragedy of marriage,—not to be allayed by any changes or divorces,—the pursuit of the rainbow that never touches earth or can be grasped! She told her stories with waving hands and gestures of the perfect mime. He yawned and went out coarsely, crashing the door to behind him, and left her associates with her looking strangely upon one another. How could she wholly hide her contempt for the hulking male whose love had been an orgasm, prolonged but worn out at last! Her smile was a shaft of light on a stormy sea.

It was not her fault if she had not the aristocratic tendency to restrain her words and then launch an arrow exactly where it would hit the mark. She had degenerated into a kind of reckless hysteria when things baulked her. Out would come her complaints even with her maids sitting about her, Madge Skelton smiling secretly, for she had felt a warmth in Henry’s eye which opened all her blossoms. Why should not history repeat itself? Jane Seymour, that pale dull frostpiece, showed no sympathy or the reverse. She looked at Anne expressionless as a fish and as cold, but performed her duties accurately.—Anne did not like her. She preferred those who would tumble out their angers and toss them over with herself and others like the emptying

of a rag-bag. Then you could tell where you were. She made little of Mary Wyatt. She had been a childhood slave, and her devotion could be taken for granted.

The child Elizabeth had her separate royal establishment, and even if the mother's instinct had been far more developed in Anne could make but little difference one way or another. George—the changed George, silent, doubtful, fostering strange new thoughts he scarcely cared to share with her—was her sole real comfort. She seldom met him alone, but when a brutality threw her in a tremble she saw his eyes answering hers and knew the brother-bond still held. It was bitter that men and women should see her plight and spread it through the courts of Europe. She told George one day as they walked in the garden:

“The French have put forward a match for my Elizabeth with a younger son of France. That will strengthen me.”

He thought with silent cynicism that those who reckoned on the continued heiress-ship of Elizabeth would certainly trade on credit rather than cash. Perhaps his silence betrayed him, for she said angrily:

“You believe in nothing! Well, you may see the importance when I tell you France is my last hope but one. A son, the first; France, second. The King freezes to me. If I can bear a son and hold France I am safe, and not only I but all of you. Then, if he will play the fool with another woman what do I care? He has served his turn. He will never divorce me; he has not the brass to affront Europe again with quarrels of his bed and board. But she must be a woman on our side, and I have shut my eyes and looked the other way when Madge Skelton uses hers on him. That would serve as well as another. But if some other woman should know as I did how to pull his strings and dance him——”

She had spoken with horrible bitterness, then was silent a moment. Suddenly she broke out into a cry with her hand to her heart.

“George—George, is there such a woman? What is pulling against me? For God's sake, tell me!”

It was a shriek like a trapped rabbit's and unloosed some agony in her heart. He had nothing to say. Presently she mourned on.

“O, to be a wife and your life on it and to know whenever he is away he may be in some wench's arms! He talks of business, of urgency with Cromwell and the like—Cromwell that hates me for what I did to Wolsey and once could have done to him,—and the very man to lock the door on a

girl and the King! I dream it nights—I see it days, and I cannot find out. The cursed world deceives me pitilessly.”

George looked at her with concern he dared not express. And they were all in it, and she on whom all depended was near mad with fear and disabled like a skilled hunter who sees the beast turn on him, suddenly terrible. Cold doubts and dreads stole over him.

“How can I know?” he said and hesitated. “I think not. And if there be a secret mistress kings are like that. Men are like that. What are you worse off than other women? Queens shut their eyes. So do all wise women.”

“Queens? But they have great parents and lands and armies. I came from too low—and what are all of you? I dare not be rivalled. George, I am in terror. O, pray God that Katharine may die and then I am safe if the French King is my friend. The King thinks she might raise an army against him with the girl Mary for her banner. She would not—could not, but he flung it in my face last night. Could he take her back? O, that she were dead. She ails and will not die—for all we do.”

“For all you do?” said George very low and repeating her words mechanically. O, one heard these things in Rome! An unwanted life—why should it stand in the way of a man’s or woman’s needs? Woe to the vanquished! But here in England, with a clear sunshine about them—and Anne—fevered in the cheeks, wasted in the body—— He shuddered a little and was mute. She stared at him and steered swiftly on another course.

“Am I not telling you that queens can risk any mistress dull enough to charm such a man? But not I. I must guide him or he will rend me. Not openly—no! He dares not, but I should be nothing where I was all. A fool like Madge—well and good!—but if it were a woman with friends—climbing friends——”

What could George say? Men are men, and the laws of nature do not change because a woman weeps even though they be tears of blood. He was certain that Henry was playing fast and loose. Twice in the dusk he had seen a hooded woman slight and young in shape who was not Madge steal like a shadow from the King’s private room where even Anne must knock and wait nowadays. But even so her fears were exaggerated. How many men end their days in peace in their wife’s bed who if they told the truth would not have the wifely tears to over-rain their pillow? And after all,—there the man spoke in him,—had not she herself been the hooded woman before her pride made the Queen her footstool? He noted that for the first time she called Katharine the “Queen.”—Had she never felt herself queen in truth? Is there some inward sanction required by the soul from itself which if it cannot give

renders the acclaim of man worthless? Her lonely grief—the fixed hard fear sticking like a dagger in her heart, almost unmanned him for a moment. Remember he had loved her with understanding and she him since a happy childhood,—and the past rushed on him with the present in a salt grey wave to overwhelm his courage and sweep it out to the great ocean of limitless despair. Chaucer knew, he thought, knew that it grows too hard for man or woman to endure:

*What is this world? What asken men to have?
Now with his love, now in the coldē grave
Alone, withouten any company.*

Yes—this life—this life—what is it? He and his had had all, and—dust and ashes! The mediæval recoil into the arms of death was on him. He shuddered as if a shadow had trailed its garment over him in passing, then composed himself. She could bear little more. Her eyes stared black in the ivory of her face. Her lips were poppy-red but not with beauty's brush. It was fever that painted them and a heart that raced at its work before dropping. "The night cometh."

"Anne, with your fears you slaughter your hopes. Did the King ever love you for anything but merriment's sake? Did we not always know that love has wings? Did you not order a winged Love cut in agate for your gift to me when I came to Court? Have you not laughed with me over Love's passing and counted over the good things left—Beauty and all her loveliness in book and song and lute and dance and the wide world that is sweet on the palate and the hidden hopes? These he cannot take. And you never loved this man. You used him."

"True and most true," she answered with fixed eyes, "but—I know not how—he is master of all the rest now. It is his vengeance or God's. I should die outright if I thought——" She stopped darkly, then said, "O, I talk folly! The agony of childbirth clawed me and I am not myself within or without. George, help me for you love me and pray for the Queen's death and that I may bear a son, and the French King's friendship. Those three things."

So he left her and presently came on Wyatt in an embrasure of the gallery. He stole out anxious and hurried.

"I waited for you, George. For God's sake get Anne to control herself! Does she not know that every word she says is smuggled abroad and at home and heartens the Queen's friends? Tell her to have pity on herself. Here have come Norris and Brereton and both were in presence when she received the French secretary Gontier that came for a treaty of marriage with the Princess Elizabeth and the young French Prince and——"

“And a good thing too. Let us pray for it!” says George.

“True. But what happened? Cromwell had taken Gontier to the Queen’s room, and the King was there but out of hearing. He gave her his letter of credence and suddenly she broke out in a quick low whisper, her hand on his arm, and said he had delayed too long and there were strange thoughts now in the King’s head. New thoughts she never put there. ‘And there is great need a remedy should be found for them,’ she whispered, ‘unless the French King my brother would have me maddened and lost. For indeed I am near to that and more, in my pain and trouble, than ever I have been since my marriage!’ This to the French who care for her while her star shines and not a day further!”

“God!” said George and leaned against the wall. He could but wave his hand for Wyatt to continue—Wyatt almost as panic-stricken as he.

“It is true. Norris heard it and Brereton, and they saw Gontier’s lips tighten under his long prying nose. She said she charged him to pray the French King regarding the affair of this marriage because she could not speak so frankly as she longed to for fear of where she was and the eyes that never ceased to watch her—not only of the King her husband but also the lords with him. She dared not write, she dared not see Gontier alone. She could no longer talk with him. All in a kind of hurrying tremble like one in fear, and so away with her to the King, talking and laughing loudly to hide her heart. And Norris, who has the French tongue, heard Gontier say to de Morrette that ‘the poor lady has doubts and suspicions of her husband,’ which he himself had already told to the French King. ‘A shooting star,’ he said, ‘here in a flash and gone in the dark!’ Warn her, I tell you! It will be blazed over the world that she knows her day is done.”

“I have warned her!” George said wearily—“I will again. But I think she is scarcely in her senses.—I am bewildered. Since the marriage,—since the coronation,—the King is changed—and yet is it we that are changed? Or life? Who knows? Not I!”

He went back to her rooms and found her alone with Smeaton. Madge Skelton, who should have been in waiting, had gone off on some occasion, and she was pouring out the story of Gontier, incredibly, to Smeaton who sat on a cushion within touching distance of her hand. Her cheeks burnt, her lips also, her eyes were fever-stricken, and she chattered like a jay. “He said.” “I said.” “If the French King knows the peril of his best ally with Henry, for I was always that,—” and so forth. The man in George could not stand it. He leaped forward and took Smeaton by the shoulders.

“What, sitting before the Queen!”—and kicked him straight out of her presence and his lute lying on the ground after him. Smeaton took it irresponsibly—unlike a gentleman, carrying his grinning half-sinister face with him—no more sense of manhood or womanhood than a tree-spirit released from bondage in an oak to buffet on a gale. And George turning on Anne told her Wyatt’s words and lashed her with them. She had lapsed from her fever into carelessness and only half heard. Someone brought in a small hamper with a gift of twelve dotterel from Lady Lisle.—It was the fashion to pamper her appetite for good living and Madge Skelton came with them and they opened the hamper and disclosed the feathered bodies and Anne pinched their breasts to feel the fat and ordered six for her supper table and the next day six and George stood amazed and Madge Skelton to see him there, and all that went before had passed like a dream and he could barely assure himself that it was true. It seemed those days that nightmare manifested its terrors in the day as well as night—a cold invisible grip that passed and left them shrinking. He said as much to Wyatt, but Wyatt shook his head in silence.

Events were gathering in storm. The news was spread in England that Katharine had herself implored the Pope to delay Henry’s excommunication and give him time for consideration and repentance. “Like her saintly spirit!” the people said. “The Pope’s holiness should canonize her when she dies. As for Nan Bullen!——” They screwed their lips as at the unspeakable and went on. It could be overheard in every street, and their safety lay in numbers,—for a man may slaughter one rat but an army pick his bones white. But Anne had passed into a new zone of feeling. It had hardened her to diamond. She did not care—not she!—She had her place, and Henry dared not undo his work in the world’s eye. He had gone too far—and stood committed. She laughed often—a laugh tinkling and hard and soullessly sweet as glass Chinese wind-bells. She ate and drank fully and daintily, and though something had passed out of her face never to return, some woodland fragrance of youth and hope—she had recaptured much of her beauty and could still woo Henry to her arms now and again especially when drenched with wine and gross plentiful eating. But his leg was a curse to him and others. It ulcerated his temper and poisoned his blood, and Wyatt and George talking in muted whispers questioned whether he could beget a child or, even if it were possible, whether the child would not follow the death-path of Katharine’s sons and damn Anne the deeper. She herself spoke freely of that chance—not only before the two men whom she could trust but before Smeaton who laughed and jested upon it and told her that when Henry was dead she must get herself a fine new husband like her former

mistress the Queen-Duchess who had married the old French King and then the brawny Suffolk. Horrible dangerous talk, gentle Mary Wyatt told her brother.

“And yet I think no real harm in it only she must laugh and laugh lest she weep. But I loathe that man. Sometimes I look to see if hoofs are hidden in his shoes. Not that he is a devil, but good and evil are mere names to him of things he never knew. Is that to be a devil, Thomas? I used to think he loved evil, with his twitching nose and strange fixed yellow eyes like a goat’s. But I think he does not. He is beyond my understanding, and when he sings I cannot take my eyes off him. He is Anne’s drug and delight—his music, I mean. She is mad for it.”

But perhaps more also, Wyatt thought with dread. She allowed Smeaton familiarities of sitting in her presence, of retorting upon her.—But then did she not allow them to others? Impossible to be sure with a woman who had all grace but no dignity and so fluid that everyone’s life flowed into hers and hers into theirs. It was her charm as a woman but certainly a queen’s peril. Was she herself as soulless as Smeaton? Was that the strange bond between them? Wyatt asked himself. Looking back over the years he could never recall a time when he had captured any soul in her even for a moment. Had he not said to her long, long ago at Hever—“Anne, you are always alone, winter and summer, shine and snow. Let me into your secret?” But that she had never done. Was the secret only that she had no soul, nothing but moods like Smeaton’s, and that it takes the universal soul to make men and women akin? There were times when he feared her as on the day when she had suddenly flung up her sleeve and her little deformed hand at him, saying:

“How could a monster like me be like other women? Once at Hever I saw you smile in looking at it, and I have hated you ever since even when I *died* to make you my own!”

Was it that abnormality in her that had allied her with a man like no other? Who shall decipher the dark mysteries of distortion in mind and body?

Yet again to Anne’s belief God declared upon her side.

Again she found herself with child; the King’s true child. Again daring all scandalous whispers and rumours she carried the news to Henry, who would never hear the least of them while his strong favour protected her. Again she saw hope rekindle in his sodden eyes. Beauty again lit her torch in her own. The yellow sparkles danced in them as long ago, when she drew his arms about her.

“And I would not tell you until I was more than sure, my heart’s own love!” she said exulting. “For this shall wash out all our troubles and with this and the death of the evil woman a new world shall begin, and we will have great quiet together and bring up our children in honour and virtue that suits with your kingliness. And Elizabeth shall marry France, and this son shall marry the Emperor’s blood—for when the Princess Dowager is dead he can have nothing against us, and we shall know peace and gladness together and see our children’s children.”

“And Mary?” he asked, not looking up at her.

“Mary shall serve her sisters and brothers as right is she should,” said Anne, encircling him with slender arms. “She can be treated well enough if she subjects herself as she shall. But her place is not ours or our children’s but beneath them.”

Henry made no agreement on that score, but he kissed her cheek, lifting it from his breast, and said slowly:

“If you give me my son all is forgiven and forgotten.”

She looked up at him in quick panic.

“All is forgiven! What have I done? And forgotten? My own sweetheart cannot forget the precious past that is locked for ever in my bosom?”

“What have I to forgive? Of that we will not speak, for you carry my son, and were you the lowest on earth that should make you royal. As for forgetting—no, I do not forget. I forget nothing.”

He kissed her in dismissing her and bid her be of good heart and courage and all should go well.

She came out—more than half satisfied, yet not quite. It differed as earth from heaven from that first rapture at Sopewell. Some transforming influence was upon him, and what she could not tell. But yet it might mark the beginning of a newer and safer era than that fiery flood of passion which rising in fury had swept away all obstacles and set her where she was. She could be content now with the calm acceptance of joint life and interests that an aging husband gives his wife,—where the children insensibly grow into the foreground and centre all enthusiasm on their bright young heads, and for the parents life lies more in the future than in the past, however impassioned. Yes, that might be the solution of her difficulties. And now, with that and with the lesson of Katharine still fresh in her mind she would reform her household and walk more cautiously herself. She would take George’s counsel and remember Wyatt’s grave disapproval. She would lean more on Mary Wyatt than on bold Madge Skelton. As for Mark Smeaton

— She suddenly came upon him sitting among the green velvet hangings of the gallery that led to her rooms. He was screwing up the strings of his lute, and as he saw her coming towards him he began humming the words of a French *chanson* which she had made known to him and had better left in France:

“When Madelon told her news—
O gay—!”

She stood silently over him, and he pushed the lute aside.

“What is it, Anne? You look as though you had been to Bishop Latimer’s sermon and his words had given you a surfeit. How did the *bonhomme* take it?”

“And that is not your concern!” she answered sharply. “What is your concern is that for various reasons known to me I mean to set my Court, men and women, on a more decent footing. I shall take order with you all and you can behave yourselves or go. And——”

He took her hand hanging by her side and kissed it. She pulled it away.

“I can tell you that if I do not it will ruin me and all of you. The King’s playtime is past. He wants majesty and decency at Court—and to give no more occasion for the gossip and lies and scandals. And I will have it also. Leap away, grasshoppers and crickets! Summer is over and Autumn upon us. I mean it!”

“O la, la, la! What a sermon!” said Mark, still holding her hand. “But you would not if you could, Anne, and could not if you would. Things grow and they rule us. Not we them. What! Reform me and Norris and Weston and Brereton and George and Bryan and a hundred more—And yourself? No. Try it—As soon might an oak shrink into an acorn again. We have made ourselves and cannot undo it. Nor can God, for that matter. Your priests will tell you so though they no longer have the Pope’s guidance. O, I know, I know. Try it!”

She wrenched her hand away and went angrily down the long corridor. No—it was true in so far that she dared not make a clean sweep of the gang, and that would be the only real remedy. But she would forbid the frolicking and rollicking and stolen kisses and ribald witty stories and overmuch wine. As she went Mark Smeaton’s voice and lute pursued her along the gallery:

“When Madelon told her news—
O gay—!”

She tried reform for a week or two, but habit and her own love of ease were too strong for her, and it soon slipped back into the old rut and her maids and men made love in dark corners with eyes swimming in wine, and except on formal occasions they treated her like one of themselves, no worse, no better. And only two kept out of the racket and riot—Mary Wyatt who loved her, and quiet watchful Jane Seymour who loved no one, but slipped from among them like a shadow when she could, to sit alone and tell her beads. For so they taunted her.

But her temper had broken up into fierce fitful angers and pride that sometimes drove them before her like scattering leaves in a gale. And again fits of listless melancholy. It was hard for them to know what she would be at, and impossible for herself. They said it was her condition and would pass. They had said that before Elizabeth's birth and it had not passed.

Her old zests centred now on persecuting the Princess Mary, but that she called a part of policy and to ensure her own child. Certainly Henry seconded her in it. The two had forced Mary to be present—a dark-eyed shadowy girl—at the birth of the heiress Elizabeth, and in the rooms outside she had heard whispers which were said to have assured her that whoever the child might be it was not her father's. Of this she said nothing. But it was observed that though she would call the child Elizabeth "sister" the word "Princess" never passed her lips. Of that she made no secret, and when summoned before the King and Anne to answer for it she had faced them in her black dress, a girl of seventeen, pale as a wisp of autumn mist but strung up into a girl's nervous defiance. Her eyes never turned on Anne, they were fixed upon her burly tyrant lolling in his chair and certain so slight a thing could be hammered into what shape he chose. Anne's gall turned to loathing burning to strike at the sight of her set lips. She spoke up clear as a little bell.

"Sir, I am your Majesty's true daughter and all I have I owe you. But I am also my mother's, and before God and her I declare I will love and serve my sister, but Princess I will never call her, for that were to disparage my mother's good fame."

She made no plea for herself. Long suffering had taught her the uselessness of complaint where hearts were granite against her.

Anne started up, livid.

"You dare!—Foul wretch, you dare! And——"

But Henry pulled her down roughly and stared his daughter in the face, a male stare, hideous to a feminine thing at its mercy.

“You have your orders. I do not argue. The Princess is my care. You are a bastard at her service. You never were and you are no more a princess than the beggar in the street, and none shall so address you. You shall go down to Hertford Castle and wait upon the Princess and thank the mercy that raises you so high. And now, what answer?”

“Your Grace, none. I cannot betray my mother. She has willed me to your obedience in all things dutiful, and that is also my own desire. But God’s law I cannot break.”

An unspeakable scene had followed with Anne fanning flames that roared high without her. Pale, silent, weak as water and as persistent the girl knelt, stiffly enduring words profitable for no man to record nor read, with little twisted hands and unbowed head, staring at something behind them—the pictured image of her mother at the time of her fatal marriage to Prince Arthur. At last they tired, not she, and she was ordered from the room with curses on her foul ambition that should meet its reward. Then she opened her lips for a brief word:

“Sir, not ambition. Were it that I could yield very easily. It is——” She stopped—in presence of the glare that met her, and so rose and went, making her reverence at the door and hearing Anne’s loud “But we will break her yet to her duty!” as she closed it.

Yet they could not, and strangely enough one stay that upheld her was the child Elizabeth. They sent her to Hertford and later to Hunsdon (where amid her sister’s magnificence she was nothing) and thought to break her by the bitter contrast. Very silent, she wasted no words on her likings or dislikings and complained of no hardships, but it was observable that for long hours she would hold the child in her lap, playing with her. To a prisoner any life that does not reject him is dear, and here Mary stayed her sorrows upon innocence that knew nothing of her wounds, and drew a sad contentment from this little spring of fresh running water. Hearing this Anne screamed that she would do the child a mischief and must not be trusted, but Anne was not at Hunsdon and they knew better there. The two were well together.

They would not let her write save to the King or the Privy Council that he set to crush her like some monstrous engine. And to the King she wrote, still steadfast.

In the most humble wise I beseech your Grace for your daily blessing. I doubt not that your Grace doth take me for your lawful daughter born in true matrimony. Wherefore if I were to say the

contrary I should in my conscience run into the displeasure of God which I hope assuredly that your Grace would not I should do. And in all other things your Grace shall have me always as humble and obedient daughter as ever was child to father which my duty bindeth me to as knoweth my Lord.

By your most humble daughter,

MARY, PRINCESS.

Perhaps it had strengthened her and hardened Henry that when she was driven out from Greenwich to Hunsdon a huge crowd of women of all classes had crowded upon her, weeping and lamenting her hard case.

“Dear my Lady—you are Princess for all that. Do what she will, you are Princess! Nan Bullen is a witch. Away with her!”

For all now rebounded on Anne and not unjustly. She had staked every hope on her children, and Elizabeth must eclipse Mary or all was undone. She redoubled her persecutions, and her creatures joined in the hunt baying with glee and blood lust.

“If she will not be obedient,” cried Fitzwilliam in Council, “I would that her head was from her shoulders that I might toss it with my foot,” and so kicked his foot horribly forward while Henry smiled on the good and faithful servant. He had sworn to Anne himself that he would kill Mary sooner than she should darken Elizabeth’s day. What had he not sworn and fulfilled? Her friends in England and in Europe trembled for her life while she sat at Hunsdon, her little rival lying in her lap.

Chapter Twenty-two

BUT HENRY was none the better nor Anne. It seemed that all their doings bore fruit in fresh weariness—in more yet to do and nothing to show for it. Their desires evaded them, and none could say how. They did what they would—but there was no triumph.

Henry seldom came her way now except for necessary appearances together. Whatever amusement he needed he no longer fed from her hand. He growled that a man wants rest and decent home-keeping women who will bear their children and honour their husbands, and if a man has not that he has nothing, even with a crown. The struggle had been too long, too bitter. It had left them leagued bandits but never husband and wife. Perhaps the possibility of wifehood had never been Anne's; she had been too seasoned a rover. But Henry had been for twenty years a decent husband as kings and men go, and in his soul he groped obscurely after the knowledge that one woman had built him and the other had unmade him, and he hated her for it and did not know why.

But he had unmade her too. She had become the primitive woman fighting for herself like a bitch-wolf trapped in her den. They say such are more terrible than the males, and Anne was more to be dreaded than Henry in that woman is more instinctive, and her instincts unchained were as subtle as deadly. The humiliations she contrived for Mary were thought out as carefully as works of art. The life she inflicted on Henry was one that no man could endure with patience even though her jealous furies alternated with wild fits of caresses and entreaties and subjection that no other man could have borne to see. They reacted fatally upon each other and he, not analytic but animal, skulked away to other pleasures and left her to her fate. Women, no doubt,—women. She told herself that the whole Court was purchasable—men and women alike.

Strangely and dangerously she did not count Smeaton purchasable. He had never asked for either place or money, but took life as languidly as a snake in sunshine except when the fire burnt within him for his art. She had tossed him a handful of gold pieces now and again, and he took as carelessly

as she gave, and what else he drew on besides his wage as musicianer neither she nor Simonette knew. But she believed the fellow utterly faithful though he never protested it either in words or looks when he sat with his weird yellow eyes fixed upon her and no soul at all in their shadows.

“We met first in the rift in the oaks, Anne,” he said, “when clouds blew about the moon like fleeces, and you stood and saw while I and my naked witches danced the dance of death and you know WHO fiddled to us from the tree the lightning blasted. But they all fell away into bones and I whistled you and you came and we danced till both dropped on the scarred ground and lay. Was it a dream or a truth? He knows, not I.”

Nowadays she would sit for an hour at a time, her chin leaned on her hand, listening to his wild talk, and when she wearied of it—as she wearied of all—to his wilder music and hideous songs that made the blood tingle in her finger-tips. He was the only thing that in reality companioned her now. Something kindred in them reached her in the narrow world where she sat alone.

“Suppose I die in my childbirth, Mark,” she said. “And I may! I walk in terror lest I slip and ruin all, and the King would kill me with a curse if I ate a plum too many,—and at the back of it his hatred.—Is death as bad as they say? I wonder. Do we rot in cold oblivion—a torch blown out, or ride the winds as *you* say, and laugh to the sun and moon? And do we know what goes on when they shut the coffin door on us? Shall I see the new wife step into my shoes—so much too small for her!—and wear my jewels and starve my child? O Mark, the riddle! And is she here already, skulking behind the arras? Who is she, Mark? I trust none but you, but may be I trust you the more. Is it Madge Skelton? I had sooner her than another, for she is my own blood, and Mary and I have kept it in the family so far—and had best so continue.”

No words could express her flippant lightness as if nothing in the world had mattered or ever would. A world as light as sea-foam and salt with all the oceans of tears shed by the weary generations, blown on a wailing wind.

“It is only in the romances that the story ends well and the King and his princess live happy ever after!” she said, caressing the dog in her velvet lap.

He looked up swiftly.

“Anne, you are no artist. That is as it should be;—If fiction were not more beautiful than life it should never be written. But there are different sorts of beauty. You have thought me more beautiful than Francis Weston, for all his porcelain face and eyes like blue glass. At least you have graced me above him.”

She looked down upon him doubtfully.

“I have,—and why?”

“Because we are both creatures of fairy blood, unbaptized for all they dashed the water on us, and neither holy nor unholy. Because we know at bottom that neither Pope, Church, nor King matters a jot, but only the wild hearts of men that carry them into strange places. When you have flung his son into his arms come away with me and let him find another to nurse his leg—the foul old man!—and bear his humour—some milk-blood bit of curd he cannot break, that will dissolve in whey if he looks at it! Come away, Anne, and we will wander the world as *jongleurs*, singing for our bread and lying in meadows by a running river to eat it. We have both of us the devil’s mark in our bodies.”

He had taken her hands in his clasp not meaning a word he said, and neither saw Lady Rochford’s weasel nose thrust in a moment at the door and pass on. And if they had known both were of the stuff that plays with danger like a tame cat and teases it until it springs at the throat, a tiger. Anne answered him coldly:

“A good life if I were eighteen, but I am over thirty, and I love my soft lying and good eating. You too, Mark! You prate but you would never act. And the world is changed. George is changed. God has crept in through the keyhole and sits in his heart and makes mouths at him. I do not tell him all my heart now. Well—you have not answered my question. Who is she?”

He played with a loose button on his doublet.

“If there is one you suspect less than another, suspect her. But if you will not run after me, Anne, at least make friends with the people. I wander the taverns in London now and again and—God! how they hate you. You are the false wife, the wicked stepmother, the martyr-maker. I would not be in your shoes, though they are of satin and jewels, for all God’s world! No—I would not! Some day they will tear you to mammocks if they get you.”

“Let them!” she said with scorn. “And you? Are you afraid of death?”

He made a wry face.

“Horribly. I do not keep up the fictions of knighthood. They are all afraid—the flesh shudders. I saw a man—once my friend—in the Tower, and he must die at dawn by the cold axe’s edge. I gave the underling a noble to let me peep in upon his face, for I wanted the look of him for one of my songs men quake at. O a horrible face to see! He sat in the corner gnawing his nails, dry-eyed, white as ash, counting each golden minute as it slipped through the hourglass. He saw the soaked sawdust about the shambles, the

masked man heaving up his axe with his black slits for eyes, the tame ravens hovering daintily nearer, and all the young world waiting the sunrise to run its joyful race while he—— You ask, but what do you believe in after death, Anne? Not the painted heavens and hells. But what?”

“I believe in nothing, for I know nothing except that here on earth we are damned for a few brief years’ mistakes. Only I know I would live for fear of worse with such a God to deal with. Fetch me wine, Mark. My head spins with your horrid talk, and for the rest I shall suspect Mary Wyatt with the King at your bidding, for if she is false to me the world and he may go hang tomorrow. O that I were free——free! I could win the people. I could—— No, no. Talk no more. Wine, and sing——sing!”

There was many a talk between them that came and went like this with foolish dangerous words many of which reached Cromwell through the fox’s ears and lynx eyes of his spies, reached him also exaggerated to suit his taste though they needed little exaggeration. It would have troubled her little had she guessed. She knew a woman in her plight was sacrosanct with Henry, and a word from her would cast Cromwell’s best woven schemes in the dust.

George watched with dread. He felt as a bird feels when the thunderstorm though distant looms up noiseless. Yet he was not hopeless, though he read the dangers. The French still supported her, but if this should change and they demand the Princess Mary instead of her Elizabeth for a French prince he believed (unlike Anne) that Henry would find some means for a divorce and the Boleyns and their faction all drop back into the shade with what plunder they could not be forced to disgorge. And that might be little enough, for Henry had of late brought bills of attainder and other such devices to such perfection that if a man escaped the devil by a leap he generally must swim for life in the deep sea. He sent some of his own gains to France to Simonette’s “cousin,” knowing them none too safe in spite of her assurances, yet seeing no better way at the moment.

“You do wisely, George,” she said with scorn concentrated to one fiery arrow-point. “That Anne——she is *folle*——she throws life away with both hands like so much water. She rates the King as he does her and thinks—— No, she does not think! She is the fool of moods and should be shut up and chained and muzzled to protect her. And the King——he is as great with the Seymour milk-face as ever he was with Anne in the old days. A new dish indeed!”

She pulled herself up at the look of blank horror and amazement on George’s face. What? Had he not the wit to see? She would have spoken, but he signed her down imperiously. He must think——he must assemble a case

which could be laid before Norfolk and his father. Priceless time had been lost while Anne indulged her moods, and this worthless Simonette of a woman had known and had not told! Good God of mercies—Thomas Seymour, the plotting gay brother all life and rascalion humours—the very man to endear himself to Henry! Edward Seymour, deeper than a well with its black sparkle hidden in ferns and dazzle of sunlight on the surface! She had her clan all ready to walk two by two behind her into empty places. And George and his father had been asleep and this march stolen on them. Presently he dropped his hand and looked at Simonette.

“What do you know? Out with it, and your hoard shall be heaped. Lie, and I will strip you of what you have if I comb France to find it. You knew this and hid it!”

It was perhaps the measure of the danger that Simonette allowed herself a smile of scorn. It was but a flicker, but he had seen it and knew his threat futile. He could not comb France, and he would have enough to do to hold his own gains if Edward Seymour had thrown one leg over the saddle. He was not the sort that takes long to settle himself and give the horse his head. George took a different way instantly. He pulled a great diamond off his finger and laid it in her palm-upward hand.

“Simonette, Anne has loved you, and I—need I remind you?—You have risen with us. Tell me on God’s body, is this truth and how far is it gone?”

She looked at the diamond and twisted it on to her finger. Her fat white face smiled its heart-hiding smile.

“Why, yes, George,—but who asked me, who cared to court the poor Simonette for her knowledge? Anne is so great a queen that a kick is as likely as a *politesse* if she wants a service, and she flies out at me till I have a mind to slap her face as I did to teach her manners when she was a child. And she is in my hands, all said and done. I know what I know, and that is that Jane Seymour is gone with child. I do not know dates, but so it is, and meanwhile Anne sits alone with a blazing wall of hatred about her because she has lost her senses and cares nothing who she galls, from the King down. And furthermore she encourages that goat-faced Mark Smeaton to treat her more like his *belle amie* than a queen, and spies about them—Well, I have said my say and risked my head, for between one or another a poor maid like myself will go to the wall. But I for one am faithful to the bread I have ate.”

A few more questions and George released her and went to Anne with hurrying steps. Simonette waited till he was out of hearing and then to the room she occupied alone—very different from that which she had huddled

into when Anne first came to Court. Hidden behind some furniture stood a little box, small indeed and carrying out her assertion of disinterested service if that were all. Yet if the room could have spoken it would have told a tale of many boxes and packets which had flowed through that door to Dover and thence to Calais and then by many a strange conveyance to the Paris she loved so much better than England. This bird had never acclimatized itself on the bleak English shores. The nest was feathered safe and warm in France.

“But I will stay and see if it be a son,” thought Simonette regarding the box. “For if so, I give her eight months more. And in eight months much may be done.”

She thrust it with its plate and jewels composedly under a heap of clothes and sat down to stitch at Anne’s great cape of velvet furred with sables. A loop had slipped. It engaged all her attention.

George found Anne in one of her moods of senseless folly. Jane Seymour? She did not believe it. No doubt there was a woman. Perhaps two. Perhaps more. There would always be one—or two—or more. Had he not himself bid her forget such things and turn a blind eye? Well—that was what she was doing. But as for Jane Seymour—mere lies! The girl was a dull pale simpleton, and Henry never looked her way. As for Simonette—she was a liar through and through. He was forced to leave her, for Madge and others came ranting in, and he left half reassured, but with a cold trembling at the heart and a watchful eye on the Seymours. No danger-signal there. It might be the woman’s lie. And he, of all others, had no reason to stake his life on Simonette’s truth. He had known her underground working at Hever. Her assertion might be the merest spite, and the more dangerous. Yet he knew too well that he should sleep in peace no more.

Anne, at all events, cast it aside. She had other and very different interests to engage her—joy and hope that set her eyes a-glitter. For now, a part of her prayer having been answered, God again prepared Himself to strike on her side against the Pope.

Posts came spurring to London from Kimbolton Castle. The Princess Dowager was dying—dying. None doubted it. The Spaniards knew it before the King, and it was the Spanish Ambassador who sent post to Henry. Cromwell wrote coarsely to the castellan Sir Edmund Bedingfeld: Why had he dared to let the Spaniards in at the death before the King? Why?—Now they would have endless trouble. She would entreat to see the Princess Mary. She would set English opinion aflame. Anne could not hide her exultation of hope. She stiffened to a mask of offence when Henry sent a

kindly message to his brother's widow (no more) through the Spanish Ambassador. Could he not see as she saw that the woman would make political capital out of her dying that would plunge them again into their old troubles? Ignore her—and show the world she was nothing! And then came the last living words with which Katharine would trouble her peace. A letter to the King. He showed it to Anne, little guessing that quick hands at Kimbolton had copied and sent it to London and many eyes beside his own and Anne's were bent upon those last words now.

MY LORD AND DEAR HUSBAND,

I commend me unto you. The hour of my death draweth fast on and, my case being such, the tender love I owe you forceth me with a few words to put you in remembrance of the health and safeguard of your soul which you ought to prefer before all earthly matters and before the care of your own body for the which you have cast me into many miseries and yourself into many cares. For my part I do pardon you all; yea, I do wish and devoutly pray God that He will also pardon you. For the rest I commend to you Mary our daughter beseeching you to be a good father unto her. I entreat you also on behalf of my maids to give them their marriage portions, which is not much, they being but three. Lastly I do vow that mine eyes desire you above all things.

KATHARINE THE QUEEN.

He sat looking at it in silence, many thoughts surging in his heart, many memories in which Anne had no share. Secure in the knowledge that he had refused the Queen's last request—a meeting with Princess Mary, Anne struck her finger sharply on the letter.

“Vindictive to the last!” she said and would have added more, but Henry's silence struck her like a blow. And more. From the man's eyes a tear—a tear!—had fallen and splashed the paper. Struck dumb, she saw him rise and fold it and stuff it in the breast of his doublet.

“Hold your cursed tongue! Be silent where you know nothing. I go to send her a message!” he said, and so went off, as he had gone after More's death, leaving her half stunned. How can women understand men and their hesitations and cowardices in their own cruelty when a woman would pierce straight to her end unhindered? It was Henry who had broken the Queen's heart. Not she. It was Henry who relented and shed tears. Not she. Strange—strange! And Katharine might yet recover and live to make their lives a bitterness.

No. The end had come. In the words of one who loved and honoured her,

She changed this woeful troublesome existence for the peace of the life celestial and her terrestrial ingrate husband for the heavenly Spouse who will never divorce her and with whom she shall live in glory for ever.

They brought the joyful news to Anne—Sir Richard Southwell eager to carry it as fast as a horse could carry him. She gave him a rich present as he hoped, crying aloud in his presence and that of others, “At last I am Queen!” and her friends exulting with her. Now there would be peace in Europe and in Rome! The scourge they had used to flog herself and Henry had dropped from their hands for ever. She exulted fiercely in her new safety, forcing it indecently on all the Court, dressing herself and her women in gay yellow on the day of the funeral. But this terrified her friends. They made hurried excuses—Yellow was the French Court mourning. Surely all civilized folk knew that!—and knew too that the Queen’s tastes and upbringing were French. No, no. She was not the woman to insult a dead enemy!—They hoped France was far enough off to safeguard their story, but the French Ambassador shook his head smiling, and it crumbled. Before Henry she guarded her tongue for a few days.

But how could she or any other understand the man? Before the tears he had shed over that letter were dry he had sent Rich galloping to Kimbolton to see whether he could not seize whatever she had left and add it to her possessions that he had retained on driving her from Windsor. It heartened Anne as much as it puzzled Rich, which is saying more than enough for Rich with his sharp lawyer’s eye detected the flaw that to seize the dead woman’s goods against the terms of her will was to acknowledge himself her husband with the right to make his own of them. The man’s letter—which he wrote from Kimbolton to the widower with his itching palms—contains both the warning and the way in which Henry might yet cheat the dead woman.

To seize her Grace’s goods as your own would be repugnant to your Majesty’s own laws, and I think, with your Grace’s favour that it would rather enforce the blind opinion while she lived—

that he was Katharine’s husband in spite of Anne and twenty like her! But yet a way might be found. Listen to the one scoundrel advising the other:—

Administer by means of the Bishop of Lincoln for her as Princess Dowager, and then confiscate all as insufficient to defray her funeral charges.

Yes—it could be done, and Anne could point out the base ingratitude of the woman who preferred to remember her servants in her will rather than leave them in her brother-in-law’s royal and beneficent hands.

But the Princess Mary’s heart burnt silently within her as she thought of that lonely deathbed and the little that was left of her mother—each thing a holy relic to her, swept into that shameless net and given to decorate “the Woman” or some newer favourite. And was Anne the better? Not she! The story of Kimbolton and the money dealings leaked abroad first, for there were faithful tongues to spread it—How she had never been paid the income due to her as Princess Dowager but had pinched and pined in the England to which she had brought a great dowry from the golden hoards of Spain. How her poor leavings had been stolen from her faithful servants. And it grew and grew and priests spread it among their flocks and nuns told it to the women whom they served, how though the Princess Mary was cruelly held away flights of singing angels had descended to welcome the dying Queen and heavenly harps had rung over Kimbolton at midnight and a great light shined over the lonely towers and darkened woods as the Celestial Gates swung open to welcome the martyr whose royalty was the least of her greatness.

Yes, Anne had destroyed a Queen, but she had created a saint now sitting in gold before the feet of God, terribly arrayed against her and for ever. Death had not removed but armed the victim.

As she rode in her litter to Shene a mob of women howled at her—that she was the great devil in human shape, a ribald, a curse to the country. Rain had not fallen, they screamed, since the blessed Sir Thomas More had died to please her. She would yet be the ruin of them all. She shrank horrified into her coverings and hated Katharine the worse and was helpless for she dared not now go to Henry, and again Europe tittered and England shuddered at their doings and the summons Henry issued to the peeresses and great ladies to attend the funeral.

Forasmuch as it has pleased God to call to His mercy out of this transitory life the right excellent Princess, our dearest sister, relict of our brother Prince Arthur of famous memory, deceased,—

and so forth to the lying end! To the end indeed. For on the day of her funeral a funeral mass was held at Greenwich which he and his Court attended in full mourning.

“And why?” asked Anne, hysterical with rage. “Surely such a woman should be forgot and no more turmoil about her than a dead dog. For my part I grieve not that she is dead but for the good end she made that makes all men sing her praises. But do not you encourage them, my heart, for her death can do us more harm than her life.”

Even Henry had no retort ready to this. But he brooded over it sullenly in a smouldering heart. Did the low-born fool not know that the eyes of the world were on them and that a man must mourn for his brother’s wife, if no more? Had she no way of measuring the rising tide of horror against their two selves in England—the flow of sermons, books, pamphlets in which the dead Queen shone as one glorified, past the utmost shaft of their malice? He at least knew the danger if she did not.

He spoke of it to Cromwell but in a growl that did not invite rejoinder.

“Surely the Princess Dowager’s death has made a great stir in England. One would think a withered old woman should pass out of life without all men’s tongues wagging. Yet it is so, is it not?”

“It is so, your Grace. Men are fools and will be,—and women worse fools,” Cromwell said, fingering his papers. “They have stories as long as from here to York of her Grace’s piety and the marvels that beset her going. The priests and monks see their profit in spreading them.”

“The priests and monks!” Henry said between his teeth. Already the spoils of the gorged monasteries were flowing in a golden stream into his coffers and he knew exactly where and how he could give a turn of the screw on those gentry.

“But how does the Queen stand with them?—you have your informers,” he asked avoiding Cromwell’s eye. His leg hurt him horribly, his temper worse, and the Nature of Things worst. Why, if he had but waited a mere couple of years this death would have relieved him naturally and gracefully from all his troubles and he could have married without any of these complications. If Anne followed her—Yes—why not? When a wise man sucks a fruit dry he throws away the shrivelled rind. O, if Katharine had but timed her death three years sooner! Already they were babbling of poison—poison, gradually and delicately administered. And that to a man with a conscience! He repeated his question angrily:

“And how does the Queen stand with them?”

Cromwell looked up and caught his eye. He read assurance in it that had never greeted him before. Still fingering his papers and with an air of heavy reluctance he made answer:

“Would that I could rejoice your Grace’s loving heart with an answer! But, knowing I serve a master whose earthly jewel is truth, I answer—Worse and worse! Both men and women say all about the streets that she turns your Majesty’s merciful heart to gall, and that as she won you by sorcery so she holds you by sorcery and turns you where she can to her own wicked ends and to most cruel treatment of all that stand in her way. Moreover they say that she can never bear you a living son because God will make her to drink of the cup that she held to the lips of the Princess Dowager. For my own part I never heard her Grace Queen Anne say an evil word of any living creature, but so it is reported.”

There was a long quiet and Cromwell quaked in his shoes. He hated Anne and had dared much to plant this shaft in the bull’s-eye—every word of it calculated. But Henry was Henry, and who could measure the dangers? Presently the King rose and hobbled to the door. There he turned.

“It shakes the very throne that such a woman is beside it!” he said. The door shut with a crash and Cromwell sat alone—exulting. He knew that already Henry’s eyes had turned elsewhere with a vengeance. He knew that Jane Seymour—passionless and apathetic—was pushed forward by her brothers, the scheming Seymours; and quick to catch the promise of dawn at midnight he had married his own boy to Jane Seymour’s sister and so staked his hoarded all on the Boleyn downfall. He had doubted his own foresight at moments, but now—!

Yet Anne basked almost sensuously in contentment for a few days after that death and burial. Katharine’s spirit might glide calm and smiling once more as one at rest through the halls of Kimbolton, as they prattled, or seated at the feet of God robed and haloed like a saint send up her prayers to Him. But there at all events they were unheard, for some irresistible force seconded her enemy on earth. Who could question it? The child would sweep her through all her troubles to triumph, though the heavens themselves fought against her.

That mood, however, could not last.

Chapter Twenty-three

ONE day in January she lay on a couch in her private chamber, not asleep for sleep was hard to trap now, but resting limbs as weary as any peasant woman's who awaits the deadly struggle of life with death in childbirth. Her first labour had been terrible—dare she hope for better this time? The birth of a son might kill her with the strong shock of joy; of a girl—with cowering terror. But she was certain it would be a boy. All the gossips, high and low, reckoning over the symptoms were confident in that prediction. A boy. Then—her thoughts were trailing off into mist and incoherent unspoken words when she heard whispering and smothered laughter in the anteroom beyond. At first she heard it listlessly,—some man and maid at their pranks, some impudence hidden under the veil of lip-respect (if that) if she should rebuke them. Things had gone far at her court—she might contrast it if she liked with Katharine's which she had often mocked at—"dull," "tame," "the hive of all the stupidities." Yet for all that a honey which gave a woman sweetness and safety. A something—but what did it matter? Katharine was dead and her laws with her. But nevertheless she had tried to buy popularity by giving large sums to the poor, and her ladies and she had turned from their fine stitcheries to make shirts and such like. Latimer, her chaplain, whom she had preferred to Worcester, had counselled it,—adding also to reform the Court as to their morals. "But," as she said to George, "if he had transposed these duties it would have been easier—the courtiers would have swallowed the gold and the villagers the dry bones of good counsel. But what I can I do?"

The whispering grew insistent. It disturbed her like the drone of swollen blue-flies upon the windowpane. She rose and glided to the heavy curtain dividing the rooms. She would rebuke them sharply and drive them out. It would be Francis Weston and one of her girls. He was a professed gallant now and his wife moped alone with his mother.

A man sat in her chair. On his knees Jane Seymour, demure and pale, a white cat stealing cream. Her face was pressed against Henry's, her arms about his neck, her whole body relaxed into his embrace. He was pawing and mumbling over her—did not Anne know how?

George had warned her—George—but how could she think? A wave of terror rushed over her. Not jealousy but doom. She staggered forward groping blindly along the wall. They sprang apart and Henry ran to her—ran—as she beat with her hands on the wall like a soul clamouring to be let out of hell. She found herself sobbing aloud with great gasps—a mere madwoman and as he caught her in his arms the colour blotted in his face into grey spots with fear, imploring, soothing, in his heart crushing the follies of women. He muttered:

“Be at peace, sweetheart, be at peace, and all shall go well with you,” repeating it senselessly as though it were a charm until his voice droned meaningless in her ears again like blue-flies and she swooned away.

He yelled for the doctors, the women, for all and any,—the Seymour had fled,—but the mischief was done. There was little strength in her to second their help. For eternities that she could not measure agonies of mind and body seized her, the flesh wrestling with death and rent asunder in the contest until she shrieked on death to end her anguish. The one sight never left her eyes,—the lovers, and in that sight all the unhappy past and dreadful present stormed her last hope and broke it and she lay in vanquished submission. The clenched grip of agony relaxed. Silence. Silence. She did not need to ask. She knew. Had she not known from the beginning? A boy—and dead. Katharine’s fate. Her fate. His doom,—but theirs, theirs also.

So she lay.

There was instant need to tell Henry and the woman appointed—for no man would dare—crawled on her errand cringing. He broke from her when the words left her lips and into the room with its flat bare light reflecting from the drawn-back curtains. He looked down at the half-dead woman lying with shut eyelids.

“I curse you—I curse you for the loss of my boy. What were you ever but a curse—a sorceress—a——”

The old spirit woke spiritlessly in her. Her dull eyes lifted, and she looked at him with hatred—the suppression of years loosed upon him in one deadly glance. He could not read that obscure sentence. He could only hear her trailing voice:

“Blame yourself. You cast me into hell for the sake of a wench. It is your murder, not mine!”

Silenced a moment, he stared at her. Then he also let loose his hatred, muttering into his red beard:

“You shall have no more boys by me.”

He shuffled out of the room leaning on his stick. Between those two it was the end.

A fortnight later Simonette locked her modest boxes and jolted down to Dover. She had taken due leave of Anne too weak to care who came or went. "If Simonette's relations were ill, let her go." What did it or anything matter? She gave her a jewel at parting and a purse of gold and turned again to drowse in Hever meadows in a dream.

But Simonette in Dover took rooms with a gentleman who transacted much useful if secret business between France and England, and there waited events with (in her strongest box) a letter addressed with ceremony to Lady Rochford the wife of George. For a consideration to be sent to an address in Paris it offered useful information which would win that lady much credit with the King. But it should not leave her hands until she was leaving England for ever with a barred door of secrecy behind her. And in this Simonette had no hatred as she had had no loves, only a cold malice seeking its profit to the last in those who had despised her and her counsel. Hatred argues a fire in the soul that may one day warm as it destroyed, but Anne had nourished a snake in her bosom, and George kissed it on the flesh that was willing to bask in the sunshine not for its life-giving but only for its gold. And like the snake she waited her time to slay those who had forgotten her.

Anne awoke from her torpor into a great silence. It was as though blindness had closed her eyes, deafness her ears,—so far and small were the fitful gaieties of the Court. She guided it no more, yet still, because she must, maintained a show of queendom and would not surrender to the encroaching apathy that crept up like a grey twilight sea after sunset.

The months rolled by, and she sank deeper into melancholy chequered with hysterical gaiety. In the first mood she would sit listlessly under the great trees of Greenwich, driving her maids from her, irritating her dogs and setting them to fight as though the sight of pain and fear soothed her restless desolation. In the other, music was her solace, and there Smeaton was her chief consolation, and Wyatt's and George's tales of the wild luxury and wickedness of the Italian cities. George told her she was still beauty-mad and that the only aspect morality could ever woo her with would be its assumption of the mask of beauty, but she shook her head. There was nothing of the ascetic in her—the sculptresque beauty of austerity chilled her to the bone. She still must surround herself with music, perfumes, roses, glorious stuffs and jewels. The sight of an ailing or sorrowful face awakened

repulsion not pity, and from luxury and the wealth of colour, sound, and line she still drew comfort.

Otherwise she troubled herself little with the great world which had once so deeply concerned her, and much drifted by her unnoticed which might determine her fate one way or another. George watched and told her what was necessary and harped on the rest with his father and Norfolk—the three of them grey with anxiety. For France had smelt change. France was suggesting a marriage with the persecuted Princess Mary. And more,—George and his father smelt change in the attitude of Norfolk—an unsmothered bitterness concerning Anne which was in itself a portent.

“He is thinking how he can leave us and spring from the sinking boat on to the rock!” he said to his father. “He never loved us—he herded with us only as a wolf in sheep’s clothing who will tear his hosts in the end.” And even as he said the words he saw the same look as he had seen in Norfolk’s eyes and remembered that he had never trusted him from the beginning of his life, but had screamed to be taken away as a child when they had sat together once without candles and he saw the firelight glitter in his father’s eyes.

Again he ran to Anne with a warning; again she repelled him. She was sitting down to her dinner and a gentleman of Henry’s had come with the usual formal compliment, “Much good may it do you”—and not only so but with the gift of a jewel, it being her name-day. She threw it into George’s hand:

“The good husband, the faithful wife!” she said with one of her acid jests. “No, George—our uncle is over-hasty. And let me tell you I buy popularity according to your counsel. My Bishop Latimer that I myself preferred to Worcester has told me my duties—to give away much money in the villages and to reform the Court as to their morals. Now, if he had transposed these duties it would have been easier—the courtiers would have swallowed the gold and the villagers the dry bones of good counsel. But what I can I do.”

And indeed she gave large sums to the poor, who took them open-eyed and wondering. The Court was beyond her power if even she had dreamed of reform. It had become a dance of death reeking with the vices of Italy without their splendour, the mocking frivolities of France without their wit, squalid, faithless, savage, and Henry’s deterioration corrupting all. “And so ends your crusade for Beauty,” she said to George with a sneer. “No, you will never convert the English. They wallow in surfeits. It is not in the Englishman to know the half is greater than the whole.”

He answered half smiling:

“And if it is so Beauty must have her martyrs. Hers is a creed also.”

There were now only two women to whom she spoke anything of her mind,—the one, Mary Wyatt, cool, gentle, steadfast, moving about her with silent pity; the other, strangely enough, the despised and lovelorn Mary Boleyn, who had some place about her, hopeful still, believing in the comforts of a “man about you to help you over the rough places and cheerful as a hearth at Christmas. What is a woman without that?” And Anne would laugh dimly and draw her on to talk of Hever and the white roses that pushed in at the window where they slept in the one bed as children—ambitious roses that climbed so high. You could kiss them and drink their perfumed dew if you knelt on the wide window-seat.

She craved for Hever and quiet. Indeed, she was frail those days and her health long in creeping back and the bitter cold of February and March against her. Mary declared you could see the firelight through her thin hand when she held it up to the blaze and the rings rattled. But they were sisters again, and even her follies had a soothing country quality like cream and brown bread and cowslips when she told of her aimless loves with this boy and that whose very names Anne had forgotten.

“But indeed, Anne, you have thrown away the King’s heart with your whimsies, and he is a good man at bottom, I warrant him!—Didn’t I know him before you?—and loves children—and there you have the mark of a good man that a woman can pacify if she goes to work with him like a mother. Kings are boys like the rest of them. Now when you shake off your weakness you must dress up like you did long ago and——”

As health returned old habit and her thirst for excitement and the riot of beauty possessed her again. After all, she was queen, and what could he do to her but carry off Jane Seymour and make a second Jericho about her? He had indeed packed her off to her parents in London, and that might mean good even if occasions took him up the river to London far oftener than his wont. Well!—she could shut her eyes now, and if the two women counselled her that to starve him of gaiety in the Court was the way to drive him abroad she knew they were right. She struggled once more to hold her feeble own.

“And send for the Princess Mary,” counselled the matron Mary out of her rich experience, “—and make it a happy family at last with little Bess and her sister that has been so good to her. Men ask for comfort and their children and no strife of tongues to din in their ears!” But there even Mary Wyatt shook her head. The Furies had been let loose too long in that family for any hope of peace, and Mary Stafford’s easy amendments were scarcely

in tune with the grim past and weeping ghosts that haunted it. There were times when Anne knew herself one of them,—only a wraith now, haunting desolate places. But still she repeated to herself over the counting of the cards and their winnings or the jiggling of dancing music,—

“He dares not touch me. I am mother of the heir and crowned Queen, and he dares not mock Europe twice.”

She made some vaunt of her security one night to her sister as she took the jewels from about her neck and Mary clucked approval:

“Not he! The kindest of men at bottom if you take him right! But give him twin boys next time, Anne, and let all the Jane Seymours go hang! She is out of your way now.”

Yes,—out of the way. The Seymours moved into a fine house on the river, and Henry’s secret boat often sought those lighted windows. History repeats itself. A trite saying, but a heartbreak in it for some. George held his tongue now. He knew Anne was at her last ditch. Why weary her with the inevitable? The Court was setting its cap at Jane Seymour in imitation of the Master. She was the unparalleled beauty. It seemed possible that she might even make demure decorum fashionable. It was openly said now behind spread hands that she was in a condition to rival Anne in the one matter that counted, the solitary one that could move Henry to marriage or defiance of the world’s opinion. They said also that she was no novice at love’s tricks and sleights and the King might yet find his hopes a mocking will-o’-the-wisp.

Anne had no hope or remedy. The King had forsaken her. George did not know what Simonette could have told him, that Cromwell’s agents and therefore the King’s were everywhere raising the people against her. She was a witch that no man could resist. She had the marks of her father and lover, the devil, in her body and could bear no wholesome child. Had any man ever seen her left hand or throat uncovered? Had there ever been a good day in England since she fooled the King? She had wept at his knees until he gave her the heads of Sir Thomas More and the Bishop. She so persecuted the Princess Mary that her own friends shrank back. And with men——Horrible stories were told and so cunningly that they carried belief burnt in on them. So, with the skies gathering black for thunder, she jested like a butterfly on the edge of a storm.

The first symptom was one that not only she but George passed over without suspicion. Parliament was dissolved early in April and would not reassemble for five weeks. Much may be done in five weeks with no Parliament open-eyed and tongued to watch intrigues! Cromwell knew that,

if Anne languid with Spring and her hectic nights and days did not. The next step followed with the smooth certainty of a revolving wheel in some giant and pitiless machinery. A secret commission was appointed to enquire into her conduct.

Brereton heard it first. God knows how some whisper overheard revealed it, but he heard that whisper and ran at once to George, gasping like a man distracted. He found him idling over a score of music and roused him to some purpose.

“A secret commission—but, God!—why? And stranger still, your father is on it, and your uncle Norfolk. Does that mean good or ill?”

George who had sprung up stood listening blankly. His lips moved in silence. His heart answered, “Ill.” Those two—who could trust them? They had prostituted honour like a strumpet to serve the King’s turn. What was there those paid political wantons would not barter—except their own safety? He asked:

“Who else?”

Brereton hurriedly gave a list of peers and officials, many of them, like the Duke of Suffolk, among Anne’s most servile flatterers and secret foes.

“But I must not stay. We must not seem to conspire,” Brereton said, gasping still. He was blue about the lips as if he had run too far. “There’s a rumour,” he said huskily, “but of course no sensible man believes it, that I shall be called before the Commission to be examined, only to be examined. But still—— Can you believe it, my lord?”

George shook his head, and Brereton scurried off with a sidelong look that reminded him of some mouse fleeing for its poor life before the leaping cat. Terrible times for hints of a commission and evidence!

George wiped the sweat from his forehead. Henry was awake—acting—but how? O, to know what lay at the back of those narrow eyes and puffed cheeks! He loathed the man in passing but had not time to dwell upon his loathsomeness for the whirling thoughts that dizzied him as snowflakes in a great storm obscure clear view.

No, he would not tell her. It might be a mistake—or a mere tentative—a flash in the pan. O, for Simonette, so obscure that none suspected her, so capable of worming smoothly into any secret. Now he had no tool to use. And life rolled smoothly on the surface. Maddening with fear and cruel suspense he only knew presently that the Commission was sitting and that Brereton was no more in his old haunts. He had disappeared suddenly and mysteriously, and none but those who would not tell knew that he had been

examined and committed to the Tower. If George had known it must have seemed to him like some rain-draggled butterfly caught in a huge gin of torment—so inadequate was the victim to the fate.

And Anne knew nothing. She went her way, laughing loudly to reassure her heart, singing to her lute, calling on Smeaton to amuse her private hours. She came on him one day, dark and downcast, very unlike his goatish glee and sinister mirth, leaning against the wall of her presence-chamber. The nearest group was too far for hearing, and halting with a sweep of her robe she asked:

“Mark, why are you so sad? Is it a case of love’s sickness? Have I hit the mark or no?” She whispered this with an upward tilt of her eyelashes that had a spark of the old spirit.

He answered gloomily:

“It is no matter. Let me be!”

She tossed her head with graceful disdain.

“Ill humour! You can scarcely expect to have me speak to you as if you were a nobleman! You forget you are an inferior person!”

If she hoped to rally him into his usual retort and gaiety she failed. He looked up at her with a look he had never given her before, something secret and sinister, as if some frightful secret lay hid between them. A moment their eyes met and held each other, then he said shortly and distantly:

“No, no, madam. You have always known a look suffices me,” and so passed on, leaving her standing astonished. The faun in him was dead.

Did he know anything then? Would he have warned her if he could, and would it have helped her? That is a dark page none can open now. She went her way with a faintish trembling at the heart.

Yet if she had known it, if George had known it, the most frightful indictment ever framed against royal woman lay at that moment before the Commission of which her father and uncle were members. Not only were four men—Weston, Brereton, Norris, and the low-born Smeaton—charged as her lovers, but nature itself was violated, and the one pure affection of her life, the one which nearest touched true sympathy and kindred friendship and natural trustful familiarity was turned into horror against her and her one defense and protector—George Rochford, her brother. There, his vile wife, Lady Rochford, was the instigator, but by whom prompted and set on, none knew—not even the lords sitting in judgment. And how her base father every memory of whose life cried out against the charge continued to sit—even that he might save his worthless skin by carneying favour with his

tyrant—remains a mystery the centuries cannot solve. She knew nothing, yet some ripple of the approaching storm must have vibrated against her heart as such things will, for she sent next day for her chaplain Parker and said a strange word to him:

“Sir, life is uncertain and none of us know when death will let fly his dart. I pray you very earnestly if my death should be sudden that you will not forsake my daughter the Princess Elizabeth but will give her such spiritual counsel as is suited to her needs. I do not say this idly, God knows! and I require your solemn promise as before our Redeemer.”

He quoted this years afterwards, as indeed it startled him and fixed in his memory at the time. Touched by her strange earnestness he promised eagerly, and at once she turned from him and went, saying no more.

And now it was May Day and her lucky month begun and all the world smiling like a maiden with the pure joy of Spring. She had word that she must go with the King to see the jousts at Greenwich—the knightly armed play in which he had always delighted. Was it an omen of better things? She might hope so—and her two Marys—Stafford and Wyatt—cheered her with comfortable prophecies. She must look to her best advantage. She must woo the King with sweet humbleness and wifely obedience.

They made her beautiful, shading the tired lines in her face and allowing a touch of the French paste to brighten her cheeks and lips. Even in very old age, Mary Wyatt told her, she would still outshine all younger beauties by an exquisite grace and distinction. She listened, believing hopefully, and so swept out in all her pomp of pages and train-bearers to Henry and his loose unwilling hand. No promise there!

They sat in the middle of the great balcony where they could look down upon the ramping eager horses and the armed knights who sat them. George was the foremost challenger, his pale face and anxious eyes hidden under the vizor of his helmet. He saluted the King and Queen gracefully with his lance and so remained statue-like. Norris was there—a defender,—and when all was ready came the thundering charge and men and horses clashed together in indistinguishable tumult. Anne leaned forward trembling with excitement which Henry beside her did not share. He sat staring sullenly down upon the tossing field, withholding his usual applause. Some of the men had opened their vizors for air. The splendid armour oppressed them in May sunshine.

As Anne leaned out her great sleeve swept her handkerchief lying on the ledge beside her into the tiltyard. It fell like a fluttering bird, and Norris, who saw it, rode forward, caught it skilfully on the point of his lance, kissed it with courtly courtesy as he would have kissed the Queen’s own hand, and

riding up beneath the balcony tendered it to her on the raised point of his lance. She took it smiling, and some of the nearer spectators applauded the pretty gesture.

Her handkerchief. Strangely and suddenly there flashed into her thoughts her handkerchief stained with wine like blood when first she had seen the King at Hever. A flash—no more.

Immediately the King rose, silent as death, his face purple with suppressed hatred. Not a word, not a look to Anne. He beckoned savagely to his nearer gentlemen in waiting, and they and he stalked out leaving dismay behind them.

Blank dismay. Anne sat motionless, uncertain what to do. The men below looked up waiting for their signal. None. People were rising hurriedly and whispering. It was as though a thunderbolt had fallen scattering in the merry crowd, and death and not pleasure had ushered them to their seats.

Anne rose herself and her women crowded bewildered about her. They huddled out, she leading and all unconscious of the cause. Was the Master ill? Guesses flew from lip to lip. The jousts were finished;—there was no more to say.

Henry rode awhile in silence foot to foot with Norris, so long his favourite of the younger Court, and suddenly turning a white glare upon him as though fire broke out of his eyes accused him of adultery with the Queen.

“You shall have mercy if you confess, but none otherwise. Think before you answer. I warn you—It is life and death! Now speak.”

Did Norris remember he had been one of the witnesses of the secret royal marriage? Yes. He pleaded that and his long devotion to Henry. He loved the Queen as the Queen and as all loyal subjects must. No more. No more—as he should answer when the trumpet shall sound and the graves give up their dead. With difficulty managing his plunging and rearing horse, so he said and swore, and Henry turning lividly upon him only repeated his orders to confess. As the bewildered young man still staunchly refused Henry swung round and ordered his arrest. It seemed but an insane dream before all life and joy lay behind him and his boat was labouring up the great river to the Tower and its Traitors’ Gate where he, most innocent, must land. An insane dream. No time to warn, to pray. The black *oubliette* had opened before him and he was thrust in to perish miserably in the dark.

Anne reached the palace to find the news rushing to meet her—a flame on the wind—that Smeaton, Brereton, and Weston had been arrested in addition to Norris. Stunned with this blow at all she knew best, she flew

from one woman to the other questioning what they knew—what was thought, and yet could get no answer. Terrifying silence surrounded her, or tears as terrifying from her sister and Mary Wyatt.

“Do you know—do you know? What is it? A plot? Does it strike at me? O, George—George, if I could see you!” she cried alone in her chamber to the two—her sister’s face all swollen and disfigured with tears and all her easy comfort spent. Anne stared at her bewildered.

“Will you say the King is a good man now, Mary? He strikes at all I love, though he dares not touch me. O, Mary, run from this place of misery and terror! O, to hide my head in the Blickling meadows and forget the dreadful world, far far from it, and see it never—never more!”

But Mary sobbed on.

They brought the Queen’s meal at the accustomed hour and with ceremony. She had stiffened her face into composure but her eye sought about her with the swiftness of the quarry. The formal message of compliment from Henry, “Much good may it do you,” was absent.—A small thing,—she had hardly listened to it yesterday, but today its silence was like the tolling of a bell. She ate hurriedly and washed the food down her choking throat with wine that brought some colour to her face. She rose. How pass the day? George, her friends who made her company, were vanished like the dead suddenly and awfully summoned. She felt herself a ghost walking in waste lands, and the people about her so regarded her with fearful eyes.

“If I could sleep!” she muttered to Mary Wyatt. “My feet are cold as death. Is there snow on the ground?”

They reminded her that it was May and took her to her bed,—the long twilight lingering greyly at her window—and bid her close her eyes. She dared not, for within the lids the Tower rose grey upon her with its grim daughter-towers standing silent over the river. No—not even in the splendours of the coronation had they for one minute hidden its terrors. She knew that now. They had only decorated them, as a crown set on a skeleton’s head hollows its eye-sockets and fleshless grin.

“And where is George?” she asked.

Silence. None knew. In what dungeons did they lie and for what? With what mysterious plot had Henry charged them and why? He had jested and laughed and drank with them all—Norris had been a close favourite, the only man invited to enter his bedchamber. Then, why? And would they plead guilty? What torture?—she had heard of the horrible secrets of the

Tower but had passed them lightly by. The rack wrenching men's limbs apart, the ghastly embrace of the Scavenger's Daughter with serried knives in her bosom, the boiling lead poured in men's ears until they shrieked out anything the torturers prompted. She sent the two women running to pick up what news they could until night came and the palace sank for a few brief hours into silence, and the exhausted women crept to their pallets beside her and slept while she lay staring for the dawn craving for a sight of George and planning how she would run to Henry and plead and threaten him into mercy, somehow, anyhow. They dressed her next day but now she would not go down among the people who haunted the galleries and presence-chamber.

"If I could veil my face—— But look at me! Look at me!" she cried to the two and fiercely. Indeed a terrible sight, her cheeks hollowed and hollows also where her eyes burnt with desolate fires. "I tell you no woman but myself could have lived beside him. He kills a woman with his presence. He is not selfish—not lustful, but selfishness and lust themselves alive in the flesh. Unhuman vices! The mother that carried him brought forth a fiend. And where is George—? I am wild with fear because he does not come."

They tried to hush her down. Her talk was enough to kill her. They got her to the table to eat and coaxed a few morsels down her throat. It comforted her a little, and the wine, and quick to rally she caught a little hope because no news had reached her.

"Only an enquiry. All will be set free tonight."

The serving-men took up the cloth from the table and steps came outside;—the first, she knew, the others were jumbled together. She sprang to meet them.—News at last and the King was sending her comfort through her uncle Norfolk, President of the Commission! She almost smiled to meet him as he came in, grim-faced, wizened, the mean face of him held in as close check as a leashed and muzzled dog.

But who was the big man behind him?—Sir William Kingston, Lieutenant of the Tower. And Cromwell, her enemy. And Audley—who never loved her. And more. Why should the King choose these to honour her?

Breathless, starting back and leaning her hand on the table to hold her up, she gasped out her question:

"Why do you come here?"

It was Norfolk who answered.

"We come by the King's commands to carry your Grace to the Tower, there to abide his Majesty's pleasure."

She stared at them one moment, seeing through their grim faces the Tower, always the Tower,—and then dragged herself into quivering composure.

“If it be his Majesty’s pleasure I am ready to obey.”

He was the stronger, always the stronger.

Her women threw a cloak about her, a hood over her head and made to follow her. The men waved them back. No—forbidden!—and so committing herself to the band of men—a woman alone, she went with them to the barge as she had gone three years before to her coronation, but now with desperate looks and the red flag of fever flying in her ghastly cheeks.

There under the canopy Norfolk planted himself beside her, and with the old family hatred stiffening her into some semblance of strength she turned upon him loathing his pinched secret face. It seemed that hatred must flash out of her in lightning and destroy the vermin.

“A prisoner may ask her crime even in England. What have they to accuse me of?”

“What you will find it difficult to answer. Your paramours have confessed their crimes. High treason, high treason, woman, in a king’s wife, and should be in every man’s. What, we have had enough of French fashions in this honest country, I think!”

She lost his taunt in stupefaction.

“Paramours? Four men. But no—you lie. Is George there? Out with the truth. What is it?”

He showed his teeth at her in a grin of hatred long hungry—fed at last.

“George also. Why not? We have worse than that from Italy and France. Do not trouble me with your oaths of innocence. Carry them to the Council.”

She sprang to her feet.

“That lie convicts the whole. It is a plot. Carry me to the King. Turn back to Greenwich. To the King! I command you on your allegiance!” she cried to the men who rowed. “The King will murder you when he knows the truth, if you have not obeyed me. Turn! To Greenwich—to Greenwich, I tell you!”

Norfolk pulled her by her mantle down into the seat.

“Fool, be silent! Would you be here without sure evidence and honest witnesses? Why, it is George’s wife who swears against him and you, and is it likely so foul a thought would grow in any decent woman’s head without

reason? Who will believe you? Not I, I swear! Save your breath for your needs. You went gaily to the Tower once despising your elders and who but you! Now—you go once more, with a difference. By the Passion of God I fling you in the river if you are not silent—and the King’s Grace will thank me for a blessed riddance!”

Wild with horror she shrieked out that she was innocent of that most monstrous charge and of all else. Lady Rochford had gone clean raving mad, and all the rest was madness too. A mad, mad world! The Duke contented himself now with contemptuous snorts and “Pish!” and “Ha!” as to a creature unworthy of reasonable answer. She gave up at last and huddled into her seat and hid herself in her hood and mantle like one who abhors the light of day. Her time would come, and he should yet pay for her shame.

It was years while the river fledged by them and the dissolving shores came and went. But at last the barge grated on the weedy stairs of Traitors’ Gate and under the low arch that was good enough for the King’s prisoners.

Chapter Twenty-Four

NORFOLK would have given his hand to help her out, but she passed blindly by and took that nearest her—a man with a common enough face who eyed her fearfully as she leaned upon him. She fell on her knees on the oozy stones before she dared the arch and cried aloud and with clasped hands.

“O Lord, help me as I am innocent of that of which they accuse me,”—a fashion common enough at the Traitors’ Gate and meaningless to all who heard, but it a little relieved her heart. Kingston had stepped out of the barge behind her and to him she turned, still with clasped hands hanging down.

“Mr. Kingston, do I go into a dungeon?”

“No, no, madam,” he answered, stiff as a ramrod. “But to your own lodging where you lay at your coronation.”

Cruelty! The word struck to her heart like a dagger. She turned sharply from him with the instinct to hide the deadly pang and could not, but fell upon her knees weeping and laughing aloud in rending hysteria. They stood about her expressionless until the agony broke down into sobbing and sobs into gasping silence, and so they brought her to her rooms in the Tower blinded with weeping, her thoughts dizzying round the one—had the men in truth confessed? And what? And had they damned her and themselves, and why? Why? Before the lords separated she again and wildly swore herself innocent.

“And beseech the King in my behalf that he will be good lord to me. And, Mr. Kingston,—I beseech you as you value God’s mercy in your death that you will have the Host left in my chamber, for I have no earthly help and to Him will I pray for mercy. For I am innocent—as before Him I say it. I am the King’s true wedded wife—his wedded wife!”

There fell a silence. The man waiting her speech, as indeed he had orders to trap her and report her every word no matter what madness uttered. She looked him hard in the eyes.

“Mr. Kingston, do you know why I am here?”

“Not I. It is none of my business.”

And still the agonizing questions.

“When did you see the King?”

“Not since the tiltyard, madam.”

A pause and sobbing cry:

“Then, Mr. Kingston, I pray you—I pray you to tell me where is my brother? Is he here? O, where—where?”

“Madam, I saw him before dinner in the Court.”

That told her nothing. What court? She clasped her hands.

“O, where is my sweet brother?”

Kingston hesitated. He had no warrant for giving information.

“I saw him last at York House,” he said at last reluctantly. She saw the evasion, and her hurrying mind fled on again.

“I hear say that I shall be accused with three men, and I can say no more than—nay! O, Norris,—have you accused me? You lie in the Tower and you and I shall die together. And, Mark, you are here too! O, my mother! You will die with sorrow!”

Kingston noted it all grimly. Every word must be written to Cromwell. They had so little evidence that even looks were precious. Then with a cry of wild protest:

“Mr. Kingston, shall I die without justice?”

Ponderously official he answered:

“The King’s poorest subject has that.”

She broke into laughter most bitter to hear. Who should know the King’s justice better than she?—who better the lips that might buy with kisses the statesmen’s verdicts? She said no more at the time. That asseveration silenced her,—that, and her memories.

They set about her, her hated aunt Lady Boleyn and a spy of her bedchamber—Mrs. Cosyns. She pleaded in vain for her Mary Wyatt but a silent head-shake rebutted that. Day and night the two watched her, sleeping and waking beside her, trapping her with cunning questions, practising on her wearied brain and emptily loosed tongue. The King’s ministering angels they were! So she told them bitterly, and they laughed and taunted her when she pleaded for her own women.

“Your love of your tale-bearers has brought you to this,” the Boleyn woman taunted her, and the woman Cosyns took up the tale.

“Why did Norris tell your almoner a Sunday ago that he could swear you were a good woman? Why should he know or care?”

She replied, they say, like a madwoman that Norris had said he would not marry awhile, and that she had answered he was waiting for dead men’s shoes and if anything but good should come to the King from his ulcered leg he would hope to marry herself.—Let those who will believe that she could so scatter her chances! To so much as imagine Henry’s death was treason. But Kingston must fill his letters to Cromwell, and the women were his scavengers.

Another day, her hands lying in her lap, her mind weaving past, present and future together, she said laughing emptily that folk would make ballads of her sad case. They would sing them in the street—a tale of woe.

“And if so, who better than Thomas Wyatt!” she said.

“I warrant you—you say well!” answered the Boleyn woman carelessly. “Who better than Master Wyatt?” She did not know what memories lay in that name. All Hever rushed upon the prisoner—its dewy roses, the long beech avenues, the deep glades where primroses grew in meditative sweetness. May-time and Hever blossoming and she—in the Tower’s grip.

“Is my father safe?” she asked once, little guessing his shame. They told her—“Safe,” and she asked no more. Better grope no further into the blackness about her. They harried her about Norris and Weston and swore to Kingston that she answered Weston had told her he loved her better than his wife and that she had “defied” him. Smeaton also. If she answered thus she was wooing death and knew it. Their stories are little worth.

“But I think the King does it to try me!” she said once smiling pitifully. The women, smiling also, hurried to write that down. They had their wage to earn. Many, from Simonette upwards, had made money of her triumph and would coin her blood into gold. From Henry downward there was already a rush for her spoils. He was plotting with Cromwell how, George being dead and Anne and Mary co-heirs of the Boleyn lands and gains, he could sweep all into his pocket when old Thomas Boleyn should pass to his own place. A woman, it seems, may be no wife yet guilty of adultery; a husband no husband, but his concubine’s heir. He made Hever and the rest his own when the hour struck.

But of all this she knew and cared nothing. They had hounded her into the ghastly limit of the world where the exhausted brain lapses sometimes into a dream apart from the body. She whispered to Kingston mysteriously that there would be no rain in England until she was released. Did he not

know none had fallen since Thomas More had gone to the scaffold? And Kingston laughed and answered with gaiety:

“I pray then it be soon, for we could do with rain,” and she turned from him absently, forgetting she had spoken. She often spoke her thoughts aloud now when she was alone. She was remembering how long ago one woman had whispered to another, “The devil’s brat! See his marks on her. She can come to no good end. Her rages are like his own!” But if so there might be signs and wonders. Powers might work to set her free—the dark Powers that had aided all her schemes till she dropped into this perdition. They said *He* was faithful to His own when God forsook them. Mark Smeaton and his wild words and the dark secrets in his eyes—she remembered! Indeed her reason tottered at times.

And then a new thought struck a whirling light in her brain. She must write to Henry. How had she forgotten that the mere sight of her words might bring relenting? She sprang at her pen.

She wrote copy after copy—destroying, re-writing. Life hung on it! But finally it was done.

She said she knew not what to excuse. He must not think his poor wife could be brought to acknowledge a fault she never committed. No prince had ever had wife more loyal. Let him not withdraw his princely favour from her and set so foul a blot on her and on his little daughter.

Try me, good King, but let me have a lawful trial and let not my sworn enemies sit as my judges. Then shall you see my innocence cleared or my guilt openly declared.

She paused there and thought awhile as well as her eddying brain could fix on any thought. Yes—she could be daring—why not? And so wrote, Jane Seymour’s face blurring her eyes:

But if you have already determined that not only my death but an infamous slander must bring you the enjoying of your desired happiness then I desire of God that He will pardon your great sin in this and that He will not call you to a strait account for your unprincely and cruel usage of me.

Again, yes,—she would dare! She had dared more than that, and wrath boiled up in her heart and sped her pen. She could not have restrained it if she would. Finally:

My last and only request shall be that myself only shall bear the burden of your Grace's displeasure and that it may not touch the innocent souls of these poor gentlemen. If ever I have found favour in your sight, if ever the name of Anne Boleyn has been pleasing in your ears, then let me obtain this request. And so I will leave to trouble your Grace further, with my earnest prayer to the Trinity to have your Grace in His good keeping.

From my doleful Prison in the Tower the 6th of May.

ANNE BOLEYN.

She made no assertion of Queenship as Katharine had done. It had always been an unreality—it was nothing now. Who had believed in it? Not the people. Had Katharine been in the Tower they might have stormed it. None had raised a voice or a finger for her. They rejoiced to see the witch go to her account.

When it was gone beyond recall to Cromwell's bloody hand she tortured herself with wishing it back, remembering the pleas and threats she might have used and had not, until it seemed the up or down stroke of a pen might weight the balance of life and death.

Her horror of Henry grew to nightmare. She saw him as a trampling idol, obscene, soulless, swollen with huge propensities and instincts, inhuman, worshipped with the hatred and fears of men and women and the oblation of their souls and bodies on his foul altar. To think she had mingled with him—courted his lust;—what plea remained for God's hearing as the headsman's sword fell?

Events raced on. Jane Seymour's affairs were urgent, and what was she to delay the coming Queen? On the 10th of May the grand jury of Westminster found a true bill for high treason against Anne Queen of England and the five men. The four commoners, Weston, Norris, Brereton, and Smeaton, were sent for trial. George as a peer must be tried by his peers. And then came the thunderclap that broke her last hope. Mark Smeaton had confessed his guilt to the Council, and later pleaded guilty to the indictment. What wild instinct of self-preservation, what hope of mercy if he made the King's way clear to his new fancy cannot be told. They said the poor wretch had undergone unspeakable torture before they dragged it from him and that all the while the tempter Fitzwilliam hung over him with his devil's smile.

“Sign, Mark, sign! and you will see what will come of it! The King is a truth-lover. Sign!”

He did it, and when they had had their will the rope was about his neck in a trice lest some last flicker of manhood should drive him to recantation.

But this was a poor triumph if they could not get the men of birth to confess also. That was beyond them. George smiled in the silence of one who knows what is decreed either way. Norris, red and flaming, swore he would die a thousand deaths sooner than accuse the Queen of that wherein his conscience he believed her innocent. Weston, whose wife had implored for him in vain, offering all her riches as the price of mercy, brushed it aside coolly. Brereton also. They pleaded not guilty.

On the 16th May (so quickly did Henry work!) Anne and George Boleyn were set for trial before twenty-six peers—a carefully packed court of judges. Norfolk their uncle as Lord High Steward sat in state, canopied and proud. Surrey, his son, shuddering inwardly, as Deputy Earl Marshal, to speed the death of the two he loved.

Northumberland, once Percy her lover, was another. He, pleading illness, left his place and fled before George, who was first arraigned, appeared. He could not face either of them.

Of this trial only the gross indictment survives. No evidence. Many have imagined it. None knows. Against George Boleyn his base wife appeared as witness—and it is said her testimony amounted to a brother's kiss as he asked the Queen for some favour and to an hour alone with her. They say he defended himself with such reason and eloquence that had all the peers been in session he must have conquered but that only the King's creatures were present and his fate a thing long decided. Had not Wolsey said in bygone days that if the Crown prosecuted and asserted it, juries would readily return the verdict that Abel killed Cain? George knew it. Defense was a useless formality. Not a man in Court but knew the reasons of that charge and the deadly resolve behind it. If he wondered at all it was only as to what reward had been his wife's price. No delays for the King in ridding himself of the Boleyns! And Anne and they had been his teachers. Having sowed the wind, need they buffet the whirlwind when it shrieked about them?

Anne was led in. This was her great day. The coronation was a child's frippery, dead and dusty. Now all the world watched her indeed. By her they would judge her cause. She carried herself bravely looking with almost meditative calm into the ranked faces of the King's creatures. She heard the horrible indictment, and lifting her hand pleaded "Not Guilty."

None have denied her courage since and none denied it then, and in every generous heart a slow reluctant shoot of pity thrust its way upward

and blossomed. The Lord Mayor, chief magistrate of London, watching her face and words said afterwards:

“I could see nothing in the proceedings against her but that they were resolved to make an occasion to be rid of her.”

Camden, writing later, asserts that “men believed her merely circumvented.” Smeaton was never produced. When she claimed that one witness was not sufficient to convict a person of high treason they told her that in her case it was sufficient. The report ran through London that she had cleared herself in a most wise and noble speech.

But why multiply comment? That speech has been given, but decorated with the imagination of poets and dramatists, historical and otherwise. It is better left to the imagination that sees a woman alone, hounded to death as she had hounded others, defending herself against no judges but pledged executioners. That is enough for all who know the ruthless irony of life. They condemned her to be burnt or beheaded at the King’s pleasure, and she listened with composure and brief comment, reasserting her innocence, and so left the court a discrowned queen and condemned felon.

She was led back to her room and George and the rest were warned to prepare for immediate death. She was cited to appear again at Lambeth before Cranmer the Archbishop to respond to questions raised as to her marriage with the King. Here we may be brief.

They alleged a pre-contract of marriage with Percy and, she admitting it, her marriage with the King was pronounced null and void. It had never been. Did she believe that so she might avoid burning and perhaps escape the axe? Did she care nothing (unlike the royal Katharine) that she degraded her child Elizabeth to bastardy? Did she believe that if the marriage had never been they could not doom her to the penalty of adultery? Mystery. But, wife or no wife, her place was wanted for another, and Henry would not again have a living wife to dim the splendour of the new queen with tears. There was no hope for her nor for any concerned in her fall.

That morning the four had been led to the shambles on Tower Hill, nor was she spared the news when the careless river brought her back to the dark shelter of the Tower. George was gone. She must follow.

Men said he made a good end. He certainly uttered the platitudes expected on the scaffold. He had had time to cast up his account with the world and find it and himself bankrupt. And in his creed death had always been a venture on probably shoreless seas. He recommended courage to the others and godly living to the spectators and added that he had never offended the King and now wished him a long and happy life. The most

enigmatic of the Boleyns was enigmatic to the last. The axe fell and that fitful brilliance was extinguished in a torrent of blood.

But they had asked no confession or recantation from him of his own—his only religion: the worship of Beauty however manifested, and keeping this locked into his heart he may be said to have died silent. And why not? Looking about the circle of hostile or curious eyes he knew that not one man present would care or know if he had made the only confession that would have opened his secret page to them. Let them judge as they could—a thing beyond all judging.

But on the last evening of life he bade farewell to the one immortal Lady of his love in a song he had made long since at Hever in the old and unforgotten days when Anne had loved it and brother and sister could sit together in happy companionship unstained by slander, making music sweet as the bubbling streams that glittered at their feet:

*“Farewell, my lute, this is the last
Labour that thou and I shall waste,
For ended is what we begun.
Now is the song both sung and past.
My lute be still, for I have done.”*

He laid it aside smiling. That was the true farewell.

They told it to Anne. She heard and understood. When had the thought of one not answered the other’s? Taking her pen she wrote her own dirge. She too would pass in music.

*O Death, rock me asleep,
Bring on my quiet rest
Let pass my very guiltless ghost
Out of my care-ful breast
Ring out the doleful knell.
Let its sound my death tell
For now I die.
There is no remedy
For now I die.*

*Alone in prison strange
I wail my destiny,
Woe worth this cruel hap that I
Should taste this misery.
Death doth draw nigh.
Sound the bell dolefully,
For now I die.*

She too laid the lute aside—the lute Henry had given her so long ago—but not smiling. She could sustain that mood no more than any other but was the sport of all. She had more to remember than George—more to fear. She was now brought to the pass where the miseries she had inflicted on Katharine were feather-light compared with her own. Had that no meaning? Would any propitiation to the offended God of the only Church she knew avert or ease her fate? She pondered that question as well as her dizzied brain could think coherently.

Finally she sent for Lady Kingston. Yes—there was one atonement without which she could not face the Darkness, and when the astonished woman came she bid her seat herself in the chair of state and in spite of her entreaties knelt down before her with humbly uplifted hands.

“No—no, madam,” cried the frightened lady, half rising and not knowing what strange confession hovered on her lips. “It is my duty to stand and not to sit at all in your presence, much less upon the seat of State of you, the Queen. I cannot obey.”

A wan smile from the kneeling woman.

“Alas, madam, that title is gone. I am a condemned person and by law have nothing left me in this life but liberty to clear my conscience. I pray you sit down. No harm!”

The other relented—but still anxiously:

“Well, I have often played the fool in my youth and to fulfil your commands I will do it again in my age. What is it?”

Then, as she sat in state under the canopy, Anne crawling on her knees before her again held up her hands and with tears falling from her swollen eyes spoke in a clear and resolute voice.

“Madam, I charge you as in the presence of God and His angels and as you will face me and answer to me before that Company, that you go and fall down thus before the Lady Mary’s grace, my stepdaughter, and in like manner ask her forgiveness on my behalf for the wrongs I have done her. This you shall promise as to a dying woman, for otherwise my conscience cannot be quiet.”

For a moment Lady Kingston hesitated, torn between fear and pity, but pity conquering she promised, and so rising hastily from the chair of State fled to tell her tale to her husband while Anne knelt by it, her face hidden. Was it real? Was it she upon whom these horrors crowded, and if so, weak and frail and utterly bereft, how could she meet them?

A numbness froze her thoughts after this. She could neither approach God nor cling to life but lay in a dim No-Man's Land of hurrying shapes of fear, some with faces she remembered.—More, Fisher, Wolsey, with stretched shadowy hands as if to draw her—the living creature—into their death. Indeed her brain was turning at times. Once she caught herself strutting along the great silent chamber turning her head to see if a long royal train swept behind her. The faces of a silently applauding crowd glared on her from the empty walls. It terrified her, and she fled from herself into the smaller room where her two persecutors sat over their careless gossip.

But later that night—the last night—she could contrive a mocking gaiety too! She must make her effect one way or the other. Sir William Kingston came to tell her the executioner had arrived from Calais, and she said, smiling:

“Mr. Kingston, I hear I shall not die before noon, and I am very sorry, for I thought to be dead by that time and past my pain.”

(Dead? But what did that mean? Would one not know—not see? A smothering blackness?)

He said, not unkindly:

“Madam, the pain shall be little. It is so subtle.”

She laughed heartily, and heard it like the voice of a stranger.

“O, yes. I have heard say the executioner is very good, and I have a little neck,”—and spanned it with her fingers and thumb, still laughing. He turned from her, half-frightened, and went hurriedly away to resume his report to Cromwell.

“I have seen men and women also executed,” he wrote with that laughter in his ears, “but to my knowledge this lady has much joy and pleasure in death. Sir, her almoner is continually with her.”

(Joy! But living people do not understand the dead. She was dead now, and the smothering blackness awaited her. But she must not crawl or weep any more. She had forgotten all but her inner nature which still asserted she must play her part well. Men must admire. They must mourn the extinction of a flame of beauty.)

Early dawn showed over the Tower when they called her to prepare to die.

The hours passed in prayer and the ceremonies of preparation. All was ready.

As they passed through the outer chamber on the way down she saw an enemy,—a man of Henry's Privy Council, standing to watch and doubtless to report. Then a wild flash of her old bitter pride broke from her. She turned and faced him, he cringing a little backward.

"I have a message for you. See you take it! Commend me to his Majesty and tell him he has ever been constant in his career of advancing me. From a private gentlewoman he made me a marchioness, from a marchioness a queen, and now he has no higher degree of honour left he gives my innocence the Crown of martyrdom."

She swept on, and the man seen by a moment's flash from her eyes fades into nothingness.

A martyr? Did she believe it? Did anyone?

From the open gateway came her procession advancing to the scaffold built opposite the little church of St. Peter of the Chains. A few minutes before twelve—so few minutes in which to see the midday sun she too had loved. But she advanced.

We have the record of an eyewitness. Sir William Kingston led her. She wore a dress of black damask with a deep white cape falling about her neck. On her head a small hat with coifs at either side of her face. A feverish flush on her worn cheeks lit up the fatal fire of beauty before its extinction. "Never," he says, "had the Queen looked so beautiful before." Four ladies followed her, at last among them Mary Wyatt, the friend of many years.

Close to the scaffold, hoping for some disgrace of cowardice in her, stood a band of enemies, Cromwell, Jane Seymour's kin, rejoicing under a decent exterior. Suffolk, coarse and greedy of blood, with others. They steeled her, if she needed it, for the last moments, but she ignored them.

Standing on the scaffold she turned to Kingston.

"Sir, do not hasten the signal for my death until I have said what is on my mind to say."

He waved his hand consenting, and she uttered a few spasmodic words so differently reported that none can judge of them coolly.

"Good Christian people, I am come here to die according to the law, for by the law I am judged and I will speak nothing against it"—that much is certain. The brief residue is blurred as if men's minds had blurred in hearing and her own voice choked—"If any person meddle with my cause I require them to judge the best. I pray God to save the King and send him long to reign over you."

Little more. She made no protest of purity. Was it pride that hindered her or fear? None knows. None can ever know. Cromwell may have misreported her, for praise for the King was needful enough those days, and silence on any plea for her.

“Thus I take my leave of the world and desire you all to pray for me,” she ended.

Her sobbing terrified ladies could not help her. They huddled together trying to blot out sight and hearing while she herself took off her hat and coif and collar, and covered her head with a little linen cap.

“Alas, poor head!” she said, “in a very brief space you will roll in the dust, and as in life you merited not a crown, so in death you deserve no better doom.”

She turned then to her ladies and spoke to them kindly, thanking them for their service, but one of them she singled out, beckoning to Mary Wyatt to draw near, which she did, weeping and trembling in every limb. In the minds of both scenes that had been, never again to be, jarred against the dreadful present. In her hand, with her arm about her, Anne laid her last gift, a little golden book with certain verses of the Psalms, and then—fearless of onlookers—she bowed herself and whispered some last words into her faithful friend’s ear,—it is said, a message to Thomas Wyatt, but sacred and secret so that none can record it. She kissed her and turned away to death with composure.

“And being minded to say no more,” says one who saw, “she knelt upon both knees and one of her ladies covered her eyes with a bandage, and then they withdrew themselves, weeping, and left her to death.”

She said softly, “O Lord, have mercy on my soul!” and again “Into Thy hands——”

“And so,” says Wyatt, “the bloody blow came down from his trembling hand who gave it when those about her could not but seem to have received it upon their own necks, she not so much as shrinking.”

She had outlived Katharine five months.

It was her faithful women who washed the blood from her sharpened features and laid what Henry had left of her in an old arrow-chest in which she was borne to the Church hard by and buried without dirge or prayer. But it is still told that at dead of night an old arrow-chest was carried from the Tower to a less haunted resting-place near the native home where she had

played at crowns and sceptres as children will; crowns as trivial and fleeting as those she knew later. There, at Salle Church near Blickling, they show an uninscribed black stone, enigmatic as herself, for her only memorial. “For,” says Wyatt, “God provided for her corpse sacred burial, even in a place consecrate, as it were, to innocence.”

Now that George was gone he was the only man who had known her in truth and he not wholly. “Wild to hold,” he knew that, and now he could hold her no more at all. Through this bloody agony she had escaped him for ever and left him bewildered. There was no known hell or heaven in which he could set her—no place of rest. But in the wilder more malign aspects of nature, the lightning flash, the thunder-peal, the restless sea and whirling snow she was a gliding influence for the few years left him. Thus in his poems she lives in sinister beauty, hard to hold, eternally remote, temptress of men and tangled herself in their ruin, to be loved with a cruel love shot through with hatred for her own cruelty, but beautiful exceedingly.

So the dark engulfed the brilliant Boleyns, portents of a day they should not live to see, splendid, treacherous, fierce, and feline. Life has moved swiftly since then but has not overtaken their pride, no, nor equalled it. Pride and pomp must walk more humbly today in face of the crowd that watches them with wolfish eyes of envy and greed. And so the wheel revolves. But why moralize? George Boleyn had said that either in life or art no story real or imaginary can be a morality, and with his own smile would have read Horace Walpole’s neat eighteenth-century *précis* of his and Anne’s rise and fall:

*From Katharine’s wrongs a nation’s bliss was spread,
And Luther’s light from Henry’s lawless bed.*

For bliss is still beneath the horizon. Luther’s light burns more than a little smoky and threatens extinction, and in spite of his well-aimed ink-dish (typical of much) the Devil with his supporters the World and the Flesh is still active. The Riddle of the Sphinx is answerable but not by the formulas of any century whether Luther’s or another’s.

But Henry, waiting impatiently for the gun from the Tower announcing his release, rode, a jolly bridegroom, to his third wedding while Norfolk and Thomas Boleyn oiled their sinews to cringe before the new Queen.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Anne Boleyn* by Elizabeth Louisa Moresby (as E. Barrington)]