

FORD FORD MADOX

THE FIFTH QUEEN: AND
HOW SHE CAME TO
COURT

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**The Fifth Queen: And
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Содержание

PART ONE	5
I	5
II	12
III	17
IV	20
V	23
VI	28
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	34

Ford Madox Ford

The Fifth Queen: And How She Came to Court

PART ONE THE COMING

I

Magister Nicholas Udal, the Lady Mary's pedagogue, was very hungry and very cold. He stood undecided in the mud of a lane in the Austin Friars. The quickset hedges on either side were only waist high and did not shelter him. The little houses all round him of white daub with grey corner beams had been part of the old friars' stables and offices. All that neighbourhood was a maze of dwellings and gardens, with the hedges dry, the orchard trees bare with frost, the arbours wintry and deserted. This congregation of small cottages was like a patch of common that squatters had taken; the great house of the Lord Privy Seal, who had pulled down the monastery to make room for it, was a central mass. Its gilded vanes were in the shape of men at arms, and tore the ragged clouds with the banners on their lances. Nicholas Udal looked at the roof and cursed the porter of it.

'He could have given me a cup of hypocras,' he said, and muttered, as a man to whom Latin is more familiar than the vulgar tongue, a hexameter about '*pocula plena*.'

He had reached London before nine in one of the King's barges that came from Greenwich to take musicians back that night at four. He had breakfasted with the Lady Mary's women at six off warm small beer and fresh meat, but it was eleven already, and he had spent all his money upon good letters.

He muttered: '*Pauper sum, pateor, fateor, quod Di dant fero*,' but it did not warm him.

The magister had been put in the Lady Mary's household by the Lord Privy Seal, and he had a piece of news as to the Lady's means of treasonable correspondence with the Emperor her uncle. He had imagined that the news – which would hurt no one because it was imaginary – might be worth some crowns to him. But the Lord Privy Seal and all his secretaries had gone to Greenwich before it was light, and there was nothing there for the magister.

'You might have known as much, a learned man,' the porter had snarled at him. 'Isn't the new Queen at Rochester? Would our lord bide here? Didn't your magistrship pass his barge on the river?'

'Nay, it was still dark,' the magister answered. The porter sniffed and slammed to the grating in the wicket. Being of the Old Faith he hated those Lutherans – or those men of the New Learning – that it pleased his master to employ.

Udal hesitated before the closed door; he hesitated in the lane beyond the corner of the house. Perhaps there would be no barges at the steps – no King's barges. The men of the Earl Marshal's service, being Papists, would pelt him with mud if he asked for a passage; even the Protestant lords' men would jeer at him if he had no pence for them – and he had none. He would do best to wait for the musicians' barge at four.

Then he must eat and shelter – and find a wench. He stood in the mud: long, thin, brown in his doctor's gown of fur, with his black flapped cap that buttoned well under his chin and let out his brown, lean, shaven and humorous face like a woodpecker's peering out of a hole in a tree.

The volumes beneath his arms were heavy: they poked out his gown on each side, and the bitter cold pinched his finger ends as if they had been caught in a door. The weight of the books pleased him for there was much good letters there – a book of Tully's epistles for himself and two volumes

of Plautus' comedies for the Lady Mary. But what among his day's purchases pleased him most was a medallion in silver he had bought in Cheapside. It showed on the one side Cupid in his sleep and on the other Venus fondling a peacock. It was a heart-compelling gift to any wench or lady of degree.

He puckered up his deprecatory and comical lips as he imagined that that medal would purchase him the right to sigh dolorously in front of whatever stomacher it finally adorned. He could pour out odes in the learned tongue, for the space of a week, a day, or an afternoon according to the rank, the kindness or the patience of the recipient.

Something invisible and harsh touched his cheek. It might have been snow or hail. He turned his thin cunning face to the clouds, and they threatened a downpour. They raced along, like scarves of vapour, so low that you might have thought of touching them if you stood on tiptoe.

If he went to Westminster Hall to find Judge Combers, he would get his belly well filled, but his back wet to the bone. At the corner of the next hedge was the wicket gate of old Master Grocer Badge. There the magister would find at least a piece of bread, some salt and warmed mead. Judge Combers' wife was easy and bounteous: but old John Badge's daughter was a fair and dainty morsel.

He licked his full lips, leered to one side, muttered, 'A curse on all lords' porters,' and made for John Badge's wicket. Badge's dwelling had been part of the monastery's curing house. It had some good rooms and two low storeys – but the tall garden wall of the Lord Privy Seal had been built against its side windows. It had been done without word or warning. Suddenly workmen had pulled down old Badge's pigeon house, set it up twenty yards further in, marked out a line and set up this high wall that pressed so hard against the house end that there was barely room for a man to squeeze between. The wall ran for half a mile, and had swallowed the ground of twenty small householders. But never a word of complaint had reached the ears of the Privy Seal other than through his spies. It was, however, old Badge's ceaseless grief. He had talked of it without interlude for two years.

The Badges' room – their houseplace – was fair sized, but so low ceiled that it appeared long, dark and mysterious in the winter light. There was a tall press of dark wood with a face minutely carved and fretted to represent the portal of Amiens Cathedral, and a long black table, littered with large sheets of printed matter in heavy black type, that diffused into the cold room a faint smell of ink. The old man sat quavering in the ingle. The light of the low fire glimmered on his silver hair, on his black square cap two generations old; and, in his old eyes that had seen three generations of changes, it twinkled starrily as if they were spinning round. In the cock forward of his shaven chin, and the settling down of his head into his shoulders, there was a suggestion of sinister and sardonic malice. He was muttering at his son:

'A stiff neck that knows no bending, God shall break one day.'

His son, square, dark, with his sleeves rolled up showing immense muscles developed at the levers of his presses, bent his black beard and frowned his heavy brows above his printings.

'Doubtless God shall break His engine when its work is done,' he muttered.

'You call Privy Seal God's engine?' the old man quavered ironically. 'Thomas Cromwell is a brewer's drunken son. I know them that have seen him in the stocks at Putney not thirty years ago.'

The printer set two proofs side by side on the table and frowningly compared them, shaking his head.

'He is the flail of the monks,' he said abstractedly. 'They would have burned me and thousands more but for him.'

'Aye, and he has put up a fine wall where my arbour stood.'

The printer took a chalk from behind his ear and made a score down his page.

'A wall,' he muttered; 'my Lord Privy Seal hath set up a wall against priestcraft all round these kingdoms –'

'Therefore you would have him welcome to forty feet of my garden?' the old man drawled. 'He pulls down other folks' crucifixes and sets up his own walls with other folks' blood for mortar.'

The printer said darkly:

'Papists' blood.'

The old man pulled his nose and glanced down.

'We were all Papists in my day. I have made the pilgrimage to Compostella, for all you mock me now.'

He turned his head to see Magister Udal entering the door furtively and with eyes that leered round the room. Both the Badges fell into sudden, and as if guilty, silence.

'*Domus parva, quies magna*,' the magister tittered, and swept across the rushes in his furs to rub his hands before the fire. 'When shall I teach your Margot the learned tongues?'

'When the sun sets in the East,' the printer muttered.

Udal sent to him over his shoulder, as words of consolation:

'The new Queen is come to Rochester.'

The printer heaved an immense sigh:

'God be praised!'

Udal snickered, still over his shoulder:

'You see, neither have the men of the Old Faith put venom in her food, nor have the Emperor's galleys taken her between Calais and Sandwich.'

'Yet she comes ten days late.'

'Oh moody and suspicious artificer. *Afflavit deus*! The wind hath blown dead against Calais shore this ten days.'

The old man pulled his long white nose:

'In my day we could pray to St Leonard for a fair wind.'

He was too old to care whether the magister reported his words to Thomas Cromwell, the terrible Lord Privy Seal, and too sardonic to keep silence for long about the inferiority of his present day.

'When shall I teach the fair Margot the learned tongue?' Udal asked again.

'When wolves teach conies how to play on pipes,' the master printer snarled from his chest.

'The Lord Privy Seal never stood higher,' Udal said. 'The match with the Cleves Lady hath gained him great honour.'

'God cement it!' the printer said fervently.

The old man pulled at his nose and gazed at nothing.

'I am tired with this chatter of the woman from Cleves,' he croaked, like a malevolent raven. 'An Anne she is, and a Lutheran. I mind we had an Anne and a Lutheran for Queen before. She played the whore and lost her head.'

'Where's your niece Margot?' Udal asked the printer.

'You owe me nine crowns,' the old man said.

'I will give your Margot ten crowns' worth of lessons in Latin.'

'Hold and enough,' the printer muttered heavily. 'Tags from Seneca in a wench's mouth are rose garlands on a cow's horns.'

'The best ladies in the land learn of me,' Udal answered.

'Aye, but my niece shall keep her virtue intact.'

'You defame the Lady Mary of England,' Udal snickered.

The old man said vigorously, 'God save her highness, and send us her for Queen. Have you begged her to get me redress in the matter of that wall?'

'Why, Providence was kind to her when it sent her me for her master,' Udal said. 'I never had apter pupil saving only one.'

'Shall Thomas Cromwell redress?' the old man asked.

'If good learning can make a good queen, trust me to render her one,' Udal avoided the question. 'But alas! being declared bastard – for very excellent reasons – she may not –'

'You owe me nine crowns,' old Badge threatened him. He picked irritably at the fur on his gown and gazed at the carved leg of the table. 'If you will not induce Privy Seal to pull down his wall I will set the tipstaves on you.'

Master Udal laughed. 'I will give thy daughter ten crowns' worth of lessons in the learned tongues.'

'You will receive another broken crown, magister,' the younger John said moodily. 'Have you not scars enow by your wenching?'

Udal pushed back the furs at his collar. 'Master Printer John Badge the Younger,' he flickered, 'if you break my crown I will break your chapel. You shall never have license to print another libel. Give me your niece in wedlock?'

The old man said querulously, 'Here's a wantipole without ten crowns would marry a wench with three beds and seven hundred florins!'

Udal laughed. 'Call her to bring me meat and drink,' he said. 'Large words ill fill an empty stomach.'

The younger John went negligently to the great Flemish press. He opened the face and revealed on its dark shelves a patty of cold fish and a black jack. With heavy movements and a solemn face he moved these things, with a knife and napkins, on to the broad black table.

The old man pulled his nose again and grinned.

'Margot's in her chamber,' he chuckled. 'As you came up the wicket way I sent my John to turn the key upon her. It's there at his girdle.' It clinked indeed among rules, T-squares and callipers at each footstep of the heavy printer between press and table.

Magister Udal stretched his thin hands towards it. 'I will give you the printing of the Lady Mary's commentary of Plautus for that key,' he said.

The printer murmured 'Eat,' and set a great pewter salt-cellar, carved like a Flemish pikeman, a foot high, heavily upon the cloth.

Udal had the appetite of a wolf. He pulled off his cap the better to let his jaws work.

'Here's a letter from the Doctor Wernken of Augsburg,' he said. 'You may see how the Lutherans fare in Germany.'

The printer took the letter and read it, standing, frowning and heavy. Magister Udal ate; the old man fingered his furs and, leaning far back in his mended chair, gazed at nothing.

'Let me have the maid in wedlock,' Udal grunted between two bites. 'Better women have looked favourably upon me. I had a pupil in the North –'

'She was a Howard, and the Howards are all whores,' the printer said, over the letter. 'Your Doctor Wernken writes like an Anabaptist.'

'They are even as the rest of womenkind,' Udal laughed, 'but far quicker with their learning.'

A boy rising twenty, in a grey cloak that showed only his bright red stockings and broad-toed red shoes, rattled the back door and slammed it to. He pulled off his cap and shook it.

'It snows,' he said buoyantly, and then knelt before his grandfather. The old man touched his grandson's cropped fair head.

'*Benedicite*, grandson Hal Poins,' he muttered, and relapsed into his gaze at the fire.

The young man bent his knee to his uncle and bowed low to the magister. Being about the court, he had for Udal's learning and office a reverence that neither the printer nor his grandfather could share. He unfastened his grey cloak at the neck and cast it into a corner after his hat. His figure flashed out, lithe, young, a blaze of scarlet with a crowned rose embroidered upon a chest rendered enormous by much wadding. He was serving his apprenticeship as ensign in the gentlemen of the King's guard, and because his dead father had been beloved by the Duke of Norfolk it was said that his full ensigncy was near. He begged his grandfather's leave to come near the fire, and stood with his legs apart.

'The new Queen's come to Rochester,' he said; 'I am here with the guard to take the heralds to Greenwich Palace.'

The printer looked at him unfavourably from the corner of his dark and gloomy eyes.

'You come to suck up more money,' he said moodily. 'There is none in this house.'

'As Mary is my protectress!' the boy laughed, 'there is!' He stuck his hands into his breeches pocket and pulled out a big fistful of crowns that he had won over-night at dice, and a long and thin Flemish chain of gold. 'I have enow to last me till the thaw,' he said. 'I came to beg my grandfather's blessing on the first day of the year.'

'Dicing ... Wenching ...' the printer muttered.

'If I ask thee for no blessing,' the young man said, 'it's because, uncle, thou'rt a Lutheran that can convey none. Where's Margot? This chain's for her.'

'The fair Margot's locked in her chamber,' Udal snickered.

'Why-som-ever then? Hath she stolen a tart?'

'Nay, but I would have her in wedlock.'

'Thou – you – your magistership?' the boy laughed incredulously. The printer caught in his tone his courtier's contempt for the artificer's home, and his courtier's reverence for the magister's learning.

'Keep thy sister from beneath this fox's tooth,' he said. 'The likes of him mate not with the like of us.'

'The like of thee, uncle?' the boy retorted, with a good-humoured insolence. 'My father was a gentleman.'

'Who married my sister for her small money, and died leaving thee and thy sister to starve.'

'Nay, I starve not,' the boy said. 'And Margot's a plump faggot.'

'A very Cynthia among willow-trees,' the magister said.

'Why, your magistership shall have her,' the boy said. 'I am her lawful guardian.'

His grandfather laughed as men laugh to see a colt kick up its heels in a meadow.

But the printer waved his bare arm furiously at the magister.

'Get thee gone out of this decent house.' His eyes rolled, and his clenched fist was as large as a ham. 'Here you come not a-wenching.'

'Moody man,' the magister said, 'your brains are addled with suspicions.'

The young man swelled his scarlet breast still more consequentially. 'This is no house of thine, uncle, but my grandfar's.'

'Young ass's colt!' the printer fulminated. 'Would'st have thy sister undone by this Latin mouth-mincer?'

Udal grinned at him, and licked his lips. The printer snarled:

'Know'st thou not, young ass, that this man was thrown out of his mastership at Eton for his foul living?'

Udal was suddenly on his feet with the long pasty-knife held back among the furs of his gown.

'Ignoble ...' he began, but he lost his words in his trembling rage. The printer snatched at his long measuring stick.

'Down knife,' he grunted, for his fury, too, made his throat catch.

'Have a care, nunkey,' the young man laughed at the pair of them. 'They teach knife-thrusts in his Italian books.'

'I will have thy printer's licence revoked, ignoble man,' the magister said, grinning hideously. 'Thou, a Lutheran, to turn upon me who was undone by Papist lies! They said I lived foully; they said I stole the silver cellars...'

He turned upon the old man, stretching out the hand that held the knife in a passionate gesture:

'Your Papists said that,' he appealed. 'But not a one of them believed it, though you dub me Lutheran... See you, do I not govern now the chief Papist of you all? Would that be if they believed me filthy in my living. Have I not governed in the house of the Howards, the lord of it being absent?'

Would that have been if they had believed it of me?.. And then...' He turned again upon the printer. 'For the sake of your men ... for the sake of the New Learning, which God prosper, I was cast down.'

The printer grunted surlily:

'Tis known no wench is safe from thy amorousness. How many husbands have broken thy pate?'

The magister threw the knife on to the table and rose, frostily rustling in his gown.

'I shall bring thee down, ignoble man,' he said.

'If thou hast the power to do that,' the old man asked suddenly, 'wherefore canst not get me redress in the matter of my wall?'

The magister answered angrily:

'Privy Seal hath swallowed thy land: he shall not disgorge. But this man he shall swallow. Know you not that you may make a jack swallow, but no man shall make him give back; I, nor thou, nor the devil's self?'

'Oh, a God's name bring not Flail Crummock into this household,' the young man cut in. 'Would you undo us all?'

'Ignoble, ignoble, to twit a man with that Eton villainy,' the magister answered.

'A God's name bring not Privy Seal into the quarrel,' the young man repeated. 'None of us of the Old Faith believe that lie.'

'Keep thy tongue off Cromwell's name, young fool,' his grandfather said. 'We know not what walls have ears.'

The young man went pale: the printer himself went pale, remembering suddenly that the magister was a spy of Cromwell's; all three of them had their eyes upon Udal; only the old man, with his carelessness of his great age, grinned with curiosity as if the matter were a play that did not concern him. The magister was making for the door with the books beneath his arm and a torturing smile round his lips. The boy, with a deep oath, ran out after him, a scarlet flash in the darkening room.

Old Badge pulled at his nose and grinned maliciously at the fire beside him.

'That is thy deliverer: that is thy flail of the monks,' he croaked at his son. The printer gazed moodily at the fire.

'Nay, it is but one of his servants,' he answered mechanically.

'And such servants go up and down this realm of England and ride us with iron bridles.' The old man laughed dryly and bitterly. 'His servant? See how we are held – we dare not shut our doors upon him since he is Cromwell's servant, yet if he come in he shall ruin us, take our money that we dare not refuse, deflower our virgins... What then is left to us between this setter up of walls and his servants?'

The printer, fingering the T-square in his belt, said, slowly, 'I think this man loves too well that books should be printed in the Latin tongue to ruin any printer of them upon a private quarrel. Else I would get me across the seas.'

'He loves any wench much better,' the old man answered maliciously. 'Hearken!'

Through the wall there came a scuffling sound, thumps, and the noise of things falling. The wall there touched on the one that Cromwell had set up, so that there was bare room for a man to creep between.

'Body of God,' the printer said, 'is he eavesdropping now?'

'Nay, this is courtship,' the old man answered. His head leaned forward with a birdlike intentness; he listened with one hand held out as if to still any sound in the room. They heard footsteps from the floor above, a laugh and voices. 'Now Margot talks to him from her window.'

The printer had a motion of convulsed rage:

'I will break that knave's spine across my knee.'

'Nay, let be,' the old man said. 'I command thee, who am thy father, to let the matter be.'

'Would you have him ...' the printer began with a snarl.

'I would not have my house burnt down because this Cromwell's spy's body should be found upon our hands... To-morrow the wench shall be sent to her aunt Wardle in Bedfordshire – aye, and she shall be soundly beaten to teach her to love virtue.'

The young man opened the house door and came in, shivering in his scarlet because he had run out without his cloak.

'A pretty medley you have made,' he said to his uncle, 'but I have calmed him. Wherefore should not this magister marry Margot?' He made again for the fire. 'Are we to smell always of ink?' He looked disdainfully at his uncle's proofs, and began to speak with a boy's seriousness and ingenuous confidence. They would tell his uncle at Court that if good print be the body of a book, good learning is even the soul of it. At Court he would learn that it is thought this magister shall rise high. There good learning is much prized. Their Lord the King had been seen to talk and laugh with this magister. 'For our gracious lord loveth good letters. He is in such matters skilled beyond all others in the realm.'

The old man listened to his grandson, smiling maliciously and with pride; the printer shrugged his shoulders bitterly; the muffled sounds and the voices through the house-end continued, and the boy talked on, laying down the law valiantly and with a cheerful voice... He would gain advancement at Court through his sister's marriage with the magister.

Going back to the palace at Greenwich along with the magister, in the barge that was taking the heralds to the King's marriage with Anne of Cleves, the young Poins was importunate with Udal to advance him in his knowledge of the Italian tongue. He thought that in the books of the Sieur Macchiavelli upon armies and the bearing of arms there were unfolded many secret passes with the rapier and the stiletto. But Udal laughed good-humouredly. He had, he said, little skill in the Italian tongue, for it was but a bastard of classical begettings. And for instruction in the books of the Sieur Macchiavelli, let young Poins go to a man who had studied them word by word – to the Lord Privy Seal, Thomas Cromwell.

They both dropped their voices at the name, and, another gentleman of the guard beginning to talk of rich men who had fallen low by the block, the stake, and gaming, Udal mentioned that that day he had seen a strange sight.

'There was in the Northern parts, where I governed in his absence the Lord Edmund Howard's children, a certain Thomas Culpepper. Main rich he was, with many pastures and many thousands of sheep. A cousin of my lady's he was, for ever roaring about the house. A swaggerer he was, that down there went more richly dressed than earls here.'

That day Udal had seen this Culpepper alone, without any servants, dressed in uncostly green, and dragging at the bridle of a mule, on which sat a doxy dressed in ancient and ragged furs. So did men fall in these difficult days.

'How came he in London town?' the Norroy King-at-Arms asked.

'Nay, I stayed not to ask him,' Udal answered. He sighed a little. 'Yet then, in my Lord Edmund's house I had my best pupil of all, and fain was I to have news of her... But he was a braggart; I liked him not, and would not stay to speak with him.'

'I'll warrant you had dealings with some wench he favoured, and you feared a drubbing, magister,' Norroy accused him.

The long cabin of the state barge was ablaze with the scarlet and black of the guards, and with the gold and scarlet of the heralds. Magister Udal sighed.

'You had good, easy days in Lord Edmund's house?' Norroy asked.

II

The Lord Privy Seal was beneath a tall cresset in the stern of his barge, looking across the night and the winter river. They were rowing from Rochester to the palace at Greenwich, where the Court was awaiting Anne of Cleves. The flare of the King's barge a quarter of a mile ahead moved in a glowing patch of lights and their reflections, as though it were some portent creeping in a blaze across the sky. There was nothing else visible in the world but the darkness and a dusky tinge of red where a wave caught the flare of light further out.

He stood invisible behind the lights of his cabin; and the thud of oars, the voluble noises of the water, and the crackling of the cresset overhead had, too, the quality of impersonal and supernatural phenomena. His voice said harshly:

'It is very cold; bring me my greatest cloak.'

Throckmorton, the one of Cromwell's seven hundred spies who at that time was his most constant companion, was hidden in the deep shadow beside the cabin-door. His bearded and heavy form obscured the light for a moment as he hurried to fetch the cloak. But merely to be the Lord Cromwell's gown-bearer was in those days a thing you would run after; and an old man in a flat cap – the Chancellor of the Augmentations, who had been listening intently at the door – was already hurrying out with a heavy cloak of fur. Cromwell let it be hung about his shoulders.

The Chancellor shivered and said, 'We should be within a quarter-hour of Greenwich.'

'Get you in if you be cold,' Cromwell answered. But the Chancellor was quivering with the desire to talk to his master. He had seen the heavy King rush stumbling down the stairs of the Cleves woman's lodging at Rochester, and the sight had been for him terrible and prodigious. It was Cromwell who had made him Chancellor of the Augmentations – who had even invented the office to deal with the land taken from the Abbeys – and he was so much the creature of this Lord Privy Seal that it seemed as if the earth was shivering all the while for the fall of this minister, and that he himself was within an inch of the ruin, execration, and death that would come for them all once Cromwell were down.

Throckmorton, a giant man with an immense golden beard, issued again from the cabin, and the Privy Seal's voice came leisurely and cold:

'What said Lord Cassilis of this? And the fellow Knighton? I saw them at the stairs.'

Privy Seal had such eyes that it was delicate work lying to him. But Throckmorton brought out heavily:

'Cassilis, that this Lady Anne should never be Queen.'

'Aye, but she must,' the Chancellor bleated. He had been bribed by two of the Cleves lords to get them lands in Kent when the Queen should be in power. Cromwell's silence made Throckmorton continue against his will:

'Knighton, that the Queen's breath should turn the King's stomach against you! Dr. Miley, the Lutheran preacher, that by this evening's work the Kingdom of God on earth was set trembling, the King having the nature of a lecher...'

He tried to hold back. After all, it came into his mind, this man was nearly down. Any one of the men upon whom he now spied might come to be his master very soon. But Cromwell's voice said, 'And then?' and he made up his mind to implicate none but the Scotch lord, who was at once harmless and unliable to be harmed.

'Lord Cassilis,' he brought out, 'said again that your lordship's head should fall ere January goes out.'

He seemed to feel the great man's sneer through the darkness, and was coldly angry with himself for having invented no better lie. For if this invisible and threatening phantom that hid itself among these shadows outlasted January he might yet outlast some of them. He wondered which of

Cromwell's innumerable ill-wishers it might best serve him to serve. But for the Chancellor of the Augmentations the heavy silence of calamity, like the waiting at a bedside for death to come, seemed to fall upon them. He imagined that the Privy Seal hid himself in that shadow in order to conceal a pale face and shaking knees. But Cromwell's voice came harsh and peremptory to Throckmorton:

'What men be abroad at this night season? Ask my helmsmen.'

Two torchlights, far away to the right, wavered shaking trails in the water that, thus revealed, shewed agitated and chopped by small waves. The Chancellor's white beard shook with the cold, with fear of Cromwell, and with curiosity to know how the man looked and felt. He ventured at last in a faint and bleating voice:

What did his lordship think of this matter? Surely the King should espouse this lady and the Lutheran cause.

Cromwell answered with inscrutable arrogance:

'Why, your cause is valuable. But this is a great matter. Get you in if you be cold.'

Throckmorton appeared noiselessly at his elbow, whilst the Chancellor was mumbling: 'God forbid I should be called Lutheran.'

The torches, Throckmorton said, were those of fishers who caught eels off the mud with worms upon needles.

'Such night work favours treason,' Cromwell muttered. 'Write in my notebook, "The Council to prohibit the fishing of eels by night."'

'What a nose he hath for treasons,' the Chancellor whispered to Throckmorton as they rustled together into the cabin. Throckmorton's face was gloomy and pensive. The Privy Seal had chosen none of his informations for noting down. Assuredly the time was near for him to find another master.

The barge swung round a reach, and the lights of the palace of Greenwich were like a flight of dim or bright squares in mid air, far ahead. The King's barge was already illuminating the crenellated arch at the top of the river steps. A burst of torches flared out to meet it and disappeared. The Court was then at Greenwich, nearly all the lords, the bishops and the several councils lying in the Palace to await the coming of Anne of Cleves on the morrow. She had reached Rochester that evening after some days' delay at Calais, for the winter seas. The King had gone that night to inspect her, having been given to believe that she was soberly fair and of bountiful charms. His courteous visit had been in secret and in disguise; therefore there were no torchmen in the gardens, and darkness lay between the river steps and the great central gateway. But a bonfire, erected by the guards to warm themselves in the courtyard, as it leapt up or subsided before the wind, shewed that tall tower pale and high or vanishing into the night with its carved stone garlands, its stone men at arms, its lions, roses, leopards, and naked boys. The living houses ran away from the foot of the tower, till the wings, coming towards the river, vanished continually into shadows. They were low by comparison, gabled with false fronts over each set of rooms and, in the glass of their small-paned windows, the reflection of the fire gleamed capriciously from unexpected shadows. This palace was called Placentia by the King because it was pleasant to live in.

Cromwell mounted the steps with a slow gait and an arrogant figure. Under the river arch eight of his gentlemen waited upon him, and in the garden the torches of his men shewed black yew trees cut like peacocks, clipped hedges like walls with archways above the broad and tiled paths, and fountains that gleamed and trickled as if secretly in the heavy and bitter night.

A corridor ran from under the great tower right round the palace. It was full of hurrying people and of grooms who stood in knots beside doorways. They flattened themselves against the walls before the Lord Privy Seal's procession of gentlemen in black with white staves, and the ceilings seemed to send down moulded and gilded stalactites to touch his head. The beefeater before the door of the Lady Mary's lodgings spat upon the ground when he had passed. His hard glance travelled along the wall like a palpable ray, about the height of a man's head. It passed over faces and slipped back to the gilded wainscoting; tiring-women upon whom it fell shivered, and the serving men felt their bowels

turn within them. His round face was hard and alert, and his lips moved ceaselessly one upon another. All those serving people wondered to see his head so high, for already it was known that the King had turned sick at the sight of his bedfellow that should be. And indeed the palace was only awake at that late hour because of that astounding news, dignitaries lingering in each other's quarters to talk of it, whilst in the passages their waiting men supplied gross commentaries.

He entered his door. In the ante-room two men in his livery removed his outer furs deftly so as not to hinder his walk. Before the fire of his large room a fair boy knelt to pull off his jewelled gloves, and Hanson, one of his secretaries, unclasped from his girdle the corded bag that held the Privy Seal. He laid it on a high stand between two tall candles of wax upon the long table.

The boy went with the gloves and Hanson disappeared silently behind the dark tapestry in the further corner. Cromwell was meditating above a fragment of flaming wood that the fire had spat out far into the tiled fore-hearth. He pressed it with his foot gently towards the blaze of wood in the chimney.

His plump hands were behind his back, his long upper lip ceaselessly caressed its fellow, moving as one line of a snake's coil glides above another. The January wind crept round the shadowy room behind the tapestry, and as it quivered stags seemed to leap over bushes, hounds to spring in pursuit, and a crowned Diana to move her arms, taking an arrow from a quiver behind her shoulder. The tall candles guarded the bag of the Privy Seal, they fluttered and made the gilded heads on the rafters have sudden grins on their faces that represented kings with flowered crowns, queens with their hair combed back on to pillows, and pages with scoloped hats. Cromwell stepped to an aumbry, where there were a glass of wine, a manchet of bread, and a little salt. He began to eat, dipping pieces of bread into the golden salt-cellar. The face of a queen looked down just above his head with her eyes wide open as if she were amazed, thrusting her head from a cloud.

'Why, I have outlived three queens,' he said to himself, and his round face resignedly despised his world and his times. He had forgotten what anxiety felt like because the world was so peopled with blunderers and timid fools full of hatred.

The marriage with Cleves was the deathblow to the power of the Empire. With the Protestant Princes armed behind his back, the imbecile called Charles would never dare to set his troops on board ship in Flanders to aid the continual rebellions, conspiracies and risings in England. He had done it too often, and he had repented as often, at the last moment. It was true that the marriage had thrown Charles into the arms of France: the French King and he were at that very minute supping together in Paris. They would be making treaties that were meant to be broken, and their statesmen were hatching plots that any scullion would reveal. Francis and his men were too mean, too silly, too despicable, and too easily bribed to hold to any union or to carry out any policy...

He sipped his wine slowly. It was a little cold, so he set it down beside the fire. He wanted to go to bed, but the Archbishop was coming to hear how Henry had received his Queen, and to pour out his fears. Fears! Because the King had been sick at sight of the Cleves woman! He had this King very absolutely in his power; the grey, failing but vindictive and obstinate man known as Henry was afraid of his contempt, afraid really of a shrug of the shoulder or a small sniff.

With the generosity of his wine and the warmth of his fire, his thoughts went many years ahead. He imagined the King either married to or having repudiated the Lady from Cleves, and then dead. Edward, the Seymour child, was his creature, and would be king or dead. Cleves children would be his creations too. Or if he married the Lady Mary he would still be next the throne.

His mind rested luxuriously and tranquilly on that prospect. He would be perpetually beside the throne, there would be no distraction to maintain a foothold. He would be there by right; he would be able to give all his mind to the directing of this world that he despised for its baseness, its jealousies, its insane brawls, its aimless selfishness, and its blind furies. Then there should be no more war, as there should be no more revolts. There should be no more jealousies; for kingcraft, solid, austere, practical and inspired, should keep down all the peoples, all the priests, and all the nobles of the

world. 'Ah,' he thought, 'there would be in France no power to shelter traitors like Brancetor.' His eyes became softer in the contemplation of this Utopia, and he moved his upper lip more slowly.

Now the Archbishop was there. Pale, worn with fears and agitation, he came to say that the King had called to him Bishop Gardiner and the more Catholic lords of the Council. Cranmer's own spy Lascelles had made this new report.

His white sleeves made a shivering sound, the fur that fell round his neck was displaced on one shoulder. His large mouth was open with panic, his lips trembled, and his good-natured and narrow eyes seemed about to drop tears.

'Your Grace knoweth well what passed to-night at Rochester,' Cromwell said. He clapped his hands for a man to snuff the candles. 'You have the common report.'

'Ah, is it even true?' The Archbishop felt a last hope die, and he choked in his throat. Cromwell watched the man at the candles and said:

'Your Grace hath a new riding mule. I pray it may cease to affright you.'

'Why?' he said, as the man went. 'The King's Highness went even to Rochester, disguised, since it was his good pleasure, as a French lord. You have seen the lady. So his Highness was seized with a make of palsy. He cursed to his barge. I know no more than that.'

'And now they sit in the council.'

'It seems,' Cromwell said.

'Ah, dear God have mercy.'

The Archbishop's thin hands wavered before the crucifix on his breast, and made the sign of the cross.

The very faces of his enemies seemed visible to him. He saw Gardiner, of Winchester, with his snake's eyes under the flat cap, and the Duke of Norfolk with his eyes malignant in a long, yellow face. He had a vision of the King, a huge red lump beneath the high dais at the head of the Council table, his face suffused with blood, his cheeks quivering.

He wrung his hands and wondered if at Smithfield the Lutherans would pray for him, or curse him for having been lukewarm.

'Why, goodman gossip,' Cromwell said compassionately, 'we have been nearer death ten times.' He uttered his inmost thoughts out of pity: – All this he had awaited. The King's Highness by the report of his painters, his ambassadors, his spies – they were all in the pay of Cromwell – had awaited a lady of modest demeanour, a coy habit, and a great and placid fairness. 'I had warned the Almaines at Rochester to attire her against our coming. But she slobbered with ecstasy and slipped sideways, aiming at a courtesy. Therefore the King was hot with new anger and disgust.'

'You and I are undone.' Cranmer was passive with despair.

'He is very seldom an hour of one mind,' Cromwell answered. 'Unless in that hour those you wot of shall work upon him, it will go well with us.'

'They shall. They shall.'

'I wait to see.'

There seemed to Cranmer something horrible in this impassivity. He wished his leader to go to the King, and he had a frantic moment of imagining himself running to a great distance, hiding his head in darkness.

Cromwell's lips went up in scorn. 'Do you imagine the yellow duke speaking his mind to the King? He is too craven.'

A heavy silence fell between them. The fire rustled, the candles again needed snuffing.

'Best get to bed,' Cromwell said at last.

'Could I sleep?' Cranmer had the irritation of extreme fear. His master seemed to him to have no bowels. But the waiting told at last upon Cromwell himself.

'I could sleep an you would let me,' he said sharply. 'I tell you the King shall be another man in the morning.'

'Ay, but now. But now...' He imagined the pens in that distant room creaking over the paper with their committals, and he wished to upbraid Cromwell. It was his policy of combining with Lutherans that had brought them to this.

Heavy thundering came on the outer door.

'The King comes,' Cromwell cried victoriously. He went swiftly from the room. The Archbishop closed his eyes and suddenly remembered the time when he had been a child.

Privy Seal had an angry and contemptuous frown at his return. 'They have kept him from me.' He threw a little scroll on to the table. Its white silence made Cranmer shudder; it seemed to have something of the heavy threatening of the King's self.

'We may go to bed,' Cromwell said. 'They have devised their shift.'

'You say?'

'They have temporised, they have delayed. I know them.' He quoted contemptuously from the letter: 'We would have you send presently to ask of the Almain Lords with the Lady Anne the papers concerning her pre-contract to the Duke of Lorraine.'

Cranmer was upon the point of going away in the joy of this respite. But his desire to talk delayed him, and he began to talk about the canon law and pre-contracts of marriage. It was a very valid cause of nullity all the doctors held.

'Think you I have not made very certain the pre-contract was nullified? This is no shift,' and Cromwell spoke wearily and angrily. 'Goodman Archbishop, dry your tears. To-night the King is hot with disgust, but I tell you he will not cast away his kingdom upon whether her teeth be white or yellow. This is no woman's man.'

Cranmer came nearer the fire and stretched out his lean hands.

'He hath dandled of late with the Lady Cassilis.'

'Well, he hath been pleasant with her.'

Cranmer urged: 'A full-blown man towards his failing years is more prone to women than before.'

'Then he may go a-wenching.' He began to speak with a weary passion. To cast away the Lady Anne now were a madness. It would be to stand without a friend before all nations armed to their downfall. This King would do no jot to lose a patch upon his sovereignty.

Cranmer sought to speak.

'His Highness is always hot o'nights,' Cromwell kept on. 'It is in his nature so to be. But by morning the German princes shall make him afraid again and the Lutherans of this goodly realm. Those mad swine our friends!'

'He will burn seven of them on to-morrow sennight,' Cranmer said.

'Nay! I shall enlarge them on Wednesday.'

Cranmer shivered. 'They grow very insolent. I am afraid.'

Cromwell answered with a studied nonchalance:

'My bones tell me it shall be an eastward wind. It shall not rain on the new Queen's bridals.' He drank up his warm wine and brushed the crumbs from the furs round his neck.

'You are a very certain man,' the Archbishop said.

Going along the now dark corridors he was afraid that some ruffling boy might spring upon him from the shadows. Norfolk, as the Earl Marshal, had placed his lodgings in a very distant part of the palace to give him long journeys that, telling upon his asthma, made him arrive breathless and convulsed at the King's rooms when he was sent for.

III

The shadow of the King kept hands from throats in the palace, but grooms were breaking each others' heads in the stables till towards morning. They fought about whether it were lawful to eat fish on a Friday, and just after daybreak a gentleman's oarsman from Sittingbourne had all his teeth to swallow for asserting that the sacrament should be administered in the two kinds. The horses were watered by ostlers who hummed the opprobrious song about Privy Seal, called 'Crummock.'

In the hillocks and lawns of the park round the palace Lutherans waited all night to welcome their Queen. They lit small fires on the turf and, standing round them, sang triumphal hymns. A Princess was coming from Cleves, a Lutheran; the day-spring from on high was visiting them; soon, soon now, the axe and the flail should be given into their hands.

In the dawn their boats could be seen pulling like water-beetles all across the pallid river from the Essex shores. They clustered in grey masses round the common steps.

A German horse merchant from the City pulled a putrid cat out of the river mud and held it over his head. He shrieked: 'Hic hocus pocus,' parodying the '*Hoc corpus meum*' of the Mass. The soldiers of the Duke of Norfolk were unable to reach him for the crowd. There were but ten of them, under a captain, set to guard the little postern in the side wall of the garden. Towards ten o'clock the Mayor of London came by land. He had with him all his brotherhood with their horses and armed guards in a long train. The mayor and his aldermen had entrance into the palace, but the Duke had given orders that men and horses must bide in the park. There were forty battles of them, each of one hundred men.

The great body came in sight, white, shining even in the grey among the trees along the long garden wall.

'Body of God,' the captain said, 'there shall be broken crowns.' He bade his men hold their pikes across, and paced unconcernedly up and down before the door.

The City men came down in a solid body, and at sight of the red crosses on their white shoulders the Lutherans set up a cry of 'Rome, Rome.' Their stones began to fly at once, and, because they pressed so closely in, the City bowmen had no room to string their bows. The citizens struck out with their silvered staves, but the heavy armour under their white surcoats hindered them. The Lutherans cried out that the Kingdom of God was come on earth because a Queen from Cleves was at hand.

An alderman's charger was struck by a stone. It broke loose and crashed all foaming and furious through a tripe stall on which a preacher was perched to hold forth. The riot began then. All in among the winter trees the City men in their white and silver were fighting with the Lutherans in their grey frieze. The citizens' hearts were enraged because their famous Dominican preacher had been seized by the Archbishop and spirited into Kent. They cried to each other to avenge Dr. Latter on these lowsels.

Men struck out at all and sundry. A woman, covered to the face in a fur hood and riding a grey mule, was hit on the arm by the quarterstaff of a Protestant butcher from the Crays, because she wore a crucifix round her neck. She covered her face and shrieked lamentably. A man in green at the mule's head, on the other side, sprang like a wild cat under the beast's neck. His face blazed white, his teeth shone like a dog's, he screamed and struck his dagger through the butcher's throat.

His motions were those of a mad beast; he stabbed the mule in the shoulder to force it to plunge in the direction of the soldiers who kept the little gate, before in the throng the butcher had reached the ground. The woman was flogging at the mule with her reins. 'I have killed 'un,' he shrieked.

He dived under the pikes of the soldiers and gripped the captain by both shoulders. 'We be the cousins of the Duke of Norfolk,' he cried. His square red beard trembled beneath his pallid face, and suddenly he became speechless with rage.

Hands were already pulling the woman from her saddle, but the guards held their pikes transversely against the faces of the nearest, crushing in noses and sending sudden streaks of blood from jaws. The uproar was like a hurricane and the woman's body, on high, swayed into the little space that the soldiers held. She was crying with the pain of her arm that she held with her other hand. Her cousin ran to her and mumbled words of inarticulate tenderness, ending again in 'I have killed 'un.'

The mob raged round them, but the soldiers stood firm enough. A continual cry of 'Harlot, harlot,' went up. Stones were scarce on the sward of the park, but a case bottle aimed at the woman alighted on the ear of one of the guards. It burst in a foam of red, and he fell beneath the belly of the mule with a dry grunt and the clang of iron. The soldiers put down the points of their pikes and cleared more ground. Men lay wallowing there when they retreated.

The man shouted at the captain: 'Can you clear us a way to yon stairs?' and, at a shake of the head, 'Then let us enter this gate.'

The captain shook his head again.

'I am Thomas Culpepper. This is the Duke's niece, Kat,' the other shouted.

The captain observed him stoically from over his thick and black beard.

'The King's Highness is within this garden,' he said. He spoke to the porter through the little niche at the wicket. A company of the City soldiers, their wands beating like flails, cleared for a moment the space in front of the guards.

Culpepper with the hilt of his sword was hammering at the studded door. The captain caught him by the shoulder and sent him to stagger against the mule's side. He was gasping and snatched at his hilt. His bonnet had fallen off, his yellow hair was like a shock of wheat, and his red beard flecked with foam that spattered from his mouth.

'I have killed one. I will kill thee,' he stuttered at the captain. The woman caught him round the neck.

'Oh, be still,' she shrieked. 'Still. Calm. Y' kill me.' She clutched him so closely that he was half throttled. The captain paced stoically up and down before the gate.

'Madam,' he said, 'I have sent one hastening to his duke-ship. Doubtless you shall enter.' He bent to pull the soldier from beneath the mule's belly by one foot, and picking up his pike, leaned it against the wall.

With his face pressed against his cousin's furred side, Thomas Culpepper swore he would cut the man's throat.

'Aye, come back again,' he answered. 'They call me Sir Christopher Aske.'

The red jerkins of the King's own guards came in a heavy mass round the end of the wall amid shrieks and curses. Their pike-staves rose rhythmically and fell with dull thuds; with their clumsy gloved hands they caught at throats, and they threw dazed men and women into the space that they had cleared before the wall. There armourers were ready, with handcuffs and leg-chains hanging like necklaces round their shoulders.

The door in the wall opened silently, the porter called through his niche: 'These have leave to enter.' Thomas Culpepper shouted 'Coneycatcher' at the captain before he pulled the mule's head round. The beast hung back on his hand, and he struck it on its closed eyes in a tumult of violent rage. It stumbled heavily on the threshold, and then darted forward so swiftly that he did not hear the direction of the porter that they should turn only at the third alley.

Tall and frosted trees reached up into the dim skies, the deserted avenues were shrouded in mist, and there was a dead and dripping silence.

'Seven brawls y' have brought me into,' the woman's voice came from under her hood, 'this weary journey.'

He ran to her stirrup and clutched her glove to his forehead. 'Y'ave calmed me,' he said. 'Your voice shall ever calm me.'

She uttered a hopeless 'Oh, aye,' and then, 'Where be we?'

They had entered a desolate region of clipped yews, frozen fountains, and high, trimmed hedges. He dragged the mule after him. Suddenly there opened up a very broad path, tiled for a width of many feet. On the left it ran to a high tower's gaping arch. On the right it sloped nobly into a grey stretch of water.

'The river is even there,' he muttered. 'We shall find the stairs.'

'I would find my uncle in this palace,' she said. But he muttered, 'Nay, nay,' and began to beat the mule with his fist. It swerved, and she became sick and dizzy with the sudden jar on her hurt arm. She swayed in her saddle and, in a sudden flaw of wind, her old and torn furs ruffled jaggedly all over her body.

IV

The King was pacing the long terrace on the river front. He had been there since very early, for he could not sleep at nights, and had no appetite for his breakfast. When a gentleman from the postern gate asked permission for Culpepper and the mule to pass to the private stairs, he said heavily:

'Let me not be elbowed by cripples,' and then: 'A' God's name let them come,' changing his mind, as was his custom after a bad night, before his first words had left his thick, heavy lips. His great brow was furrowed, his enormous bulk of scarlet, with the great double dog-rose embroidered across the broad chest, limped a little over his right knee and the foot dragged. His eyes were bloodshot and heavy, his head hung forward as though he were about to charge the world with his forehead. From time to time his eyebrows lifted painfully, and he swallowed with an effort as if he were choking.

Behind him the three hundred windows of the palace Placentia seemed to peer at him like eyes, curious, hostile, lugubrious or amazed. He tore violently at his collar and muttered: 'I stifle.' His great hand was swollen by its glove, sewn with pearls, to an immense size.

The gentleman told him of the riot in the park, and narrated the blasphemy of the German Lutheran, who had held up a putrid dog in parody of the Holy Mass.

The face of the King grew suffused with purple blood.

'Let those men be cut down,' he said, and he conceived a sorting out of all heresy, a cleansing of his land with blood. He looked swiftly at the low sky as if a thunderbolt or a leprosy must descend upon his head. He commanded swiftly, 'Let them be taken in scores. Bid the gentlemen of my guard go, and armourers with shackles.'

The sharp pain of the ulcer in his leg gnawed up to his thigh, and he stood, dejected, like a hunted man, with his head hanging on his chest, so that his great bonnet pointed at the ground. He commanded that both Privy Seal and the Duke of Norfolk should come to him there upon the instant.

This grey and heavy King, who had been a great scholar, dreaded to read in Latin now, for it brought the language of the Mass into his mind; he had been a composer of music and a skilful player on the lute, but no music and no voices could any more tickle his ears.

Women he had loved well in his day. Now, when he desired rest, music, good converse and the love of women, he was forced to wed with a creature whose face resembled that of a pig stuck with cloves. He had raged over-night, but, with the morning, he had seen himself growing old, on a tottering throne, assailed by all the forces of the Old Faith in Christendom. Rebellions burst out like fires every day in all the corners of his land. He had no men whom he could trust: if he granted a boon to one party it held them only for a day, and the other side rose up. Now he rested upon the Lutherans, whom he hated, and, standing on that terrace, he had watched gloomily the great State barges of the Ambassadors from the Empire and from France come with majestic ostentation downstream abreast, to moor side by side against the steps of his water-gate.

It was a parade of their new friendship. Six months ago their trains could not have mingled without bloodshed.

At last there stood before him Thomas Cromwell, un-bonneted, smiling, humorous, supple and confident for himself and for his master's cause, a man whom his Prince might trust. And the long melancholy and sinister figure of the Duke of Norfolk stalked stiffly down among the yew trees powdered with frost. The furs from round his neck fluttered about his knees like the wings of a crow, and he dug his Earl Marshal's golden staff viciously into the ground. He waved his jewelled cap and stood still at a little distance. Cromwell regarded him with a sinister and watchful amusement; he looked back at Privy Seal with a black malignancy that hardened his yellow features, his hooked nose and pursed lips into the likeness of a mask representing hatred.

This Norfolk was that Earl of Surrey who had won Flodden Field. They all then esteemed him the greatest captain of his day – in the field a commander sleepless, cunning, cautious, and, in striking, a Hotspur.

A dour and silent man, he was the head of all the Catholics, of all the reaction of that day. But, in the long duel between himself and Cromwell he had seemed fated to be driven from post to post, never daring to proclaim himself openly the foe of the man he dreaded and hated. Cranmer, with his tolerant spirit, he despised. Here was an archbishop who might rack and burn for discipline's sake, and he did nothing... And all these New Learning men with their powers of language, these dark bearded men with twinkling and sagacious eyes, he detested. He went clean shaved, lean and yellow-faced, with a hooked nose that seemed about to dig into his chin. It was he who said first: 'It was merry in England before this New Learning came in.'

The night before, the King had sworn that he would have Privy Seal's head because Anne of Cleves resembled a pig stuck with cloves. And, shaking and shivering with cold that penetrated his very inwards, with a black pain on his brow and sparks dancing before his jaundiced eyes, the Duke cursed himself for not having urged then the immediate arrest of the Privy Seal. For here stood Cromwell, arrogantly by the King's side with the King graciously commanding him to cover his head because it was very cold and Cromwell was known to suffer with the earache.

'You are Earl Marshal,' the King's voice drowned Norfolk's morning greeting. He veered upon the Duke with such violence that his enormous red bulk seemed about to totter over upon the tall and bent figure. A searing pain had shot up his side, and, as he gripped it, he appeared to be furiously plucking at his dagger. He had imagined Chapuys and Marillac, the Ambassadors, coming upon guards with broken heads and sending to Paris letters over which Francis and his nephew should snigger and chuckle.

'You are Earl Marshal. You have the ordering of these ceremonies, and you let rebels and knaves break heads within my very park for all the world to see!'

In his rage Norfolk blurted out:

'Privy Seal hath his friends, too – these Lutherans. What man could have foreseen how insolent they be grown, for joy at welcoming a Queen of their faith,' he repeated hotly. 'No man could have foreseen. My bands are curtailed.'

Cromwell said:

'Aye, men are needed to keep down the Papists of your North parts.'

The two men faced each other. It had been part of the Duke's plan – and Cromwell knew it very well – that the City men should meet with the Lutherans there in the King's own park. It would show the insolence of the heretics upon whom the Privy Seal relied, and it might prove, too, the strength of the Old Faith in the stronghold of the City.

Henry rated violently. It put him to shame, he repeated many times. 'Brawling beneath my face, cries in my ears, and the smell of bloodshed in my nose.'

Norfolk repeated dully that the Protestants were wondrous insolent. But Cromwell pointed out with a genial amusement: 'My Lord Duke should have housed the City men within the palace. Cat will fight with dog the world over if you set them together.'

The Duke answered malignantly:

'It was fitting the citizens should wait to enter. I would not cumber his Highness' courtyards. We know not yet that this Lady cometh to be welcomed Queen.'

'Body of God,' the King said with a new violence: 'do ye prate of these matters?' His heavy jaws threatened like a dog's. 'Hast thou set lousy knaves debating of these?'

Norfolk answered darkly that it had been treated of in the Council last night.

'My Council! My Council!' The King seemed to bay out the words. 'There shall some mothers' sons rue this!'

Norfolk muttered that he had spoken of it with no man not a Councillor. The King's Highness' self had moved first in this.

Henry suddenly waved both hands at the sky.

'Take you good order,' he said heavily into the lean and yellow face of the Duke. 'Marshal these ceremonies fitly from henceforth. Let nothing lack. Get you gone.' An end must be made of talk and gossip. The rumour of last night's Council must appear an idle tale, a falsehood of despairing Papists. 'The Queen cometh,' he said.

With the droop of the Duke's long arms his hat seemed to brush the stones, his head fell on his chest. It was finished.

He had seen so many things go that he loved. And now this old woman with her Germans, her heresies – her children doubtless – meant the final downfall of the Old Order in his day. It would return, but he would never see it. And under Cromwell's sardonic gaze his head hung limply, and his eyes filled with hot and blinding drops. His face trembled like that of a very old man.

The King had thrust his hand through Cromwell's arm, and, with a heavy familiarity as if he would make him forget the Council of last night, he was drawing him away towards the water-gate. He turned his head over his shoulder and repeated balefully:

'The Queen cometh.'

As he did so his eye fell upon a man tugging at the bridle of a mule that had a woman on its back. He passed on with his minister.

V

In turning, Norfolk came against them at the very end of the path. The man's green coat was spotted with filth, one of his sleeves was torn off and dangled about his heel. The mule's knees were cut, and the woman trembled with her hidden face and shrinking figure.

They made him choke with rage and fear. Some other procession might have come against these vagabonds, and the blame would have been his. It disgusted him that they were within a yard of himself.

'Are there no side paths?' he asked harshly.

Culpepper blazed round upon him:

'How might I know? Why sent you no guide?' His vivid red beard was matted into tails, his face pallid and as if blazing with rage. The porter had turned them loose into the empty garden.

'Kat is sore hurt,' he mumbled, half in tears. 'Her arm is welly broken.' He glared at the Duke. 'Care you no more for your own blood and kin?'

Norfolk asked:

'Who is your Kat? Can I know all the Howards?'

Culpepper snarled:

'Aye, we may trust you not to succour your brother's children.'

The Duke said:

'Why, she shall back to the palace. They shall comfort her.'

'That shall she not,' Culpepper flustered. 'Sh'ath her father's commands to hasten to Dover.'

The Duke caught her eyes in the fur hood that hid her face like a Moorish woman's veil. They were large, grey and arresting beneath the pallor of her forehead. They looked at him, questioning and judging.

'Wilt not come to my lodging?' he asked.

'Aye, will I,' came a little muffled by the fur.

'That shall she not,' Culpepper repeated.

The Duke looked at him with gloomy and inquisitive surprise.

'Aye, I am her mother's cousin,' he said. 'I fend for her, which you have never done. Her father's house is burnt by rioters, and her men are joined in the pillaging. But I'll warrant you knew it not.'

Katharine Howard with her sound hand was trying to unfasten her hood, hastily and eagerly.

'Wilt come?' the Duke asked hurriedly. 'This must be determined.'

Culpepper hissed: 'By the bones of St. Nairn she shall not.' She lifted her maimed hand involuntarily, and, at the sear of pain, her eyes closed. Immediately Culpepper was beside her knees, supporting her with his arms and muttering sounds of endearment and despair.

The Duke, hearing behind him the swish pad of heavy soft shoes, as if a bear were coming over the pavement, faced the King.

'This is my brother's child,' he said. 'She is sore hurt. I would not leave her like a dog,' and he asked the King's pardon.

'Why, God forbid,' the King said. 'Your Grace shall succour her.' Culpepper had his back to them, caring nothing for either in his passion. Henry said: 'Aye, take good care for her,' and passed on with Privy Seal on his arm.

The Duke heaved a sigh of relief. But he remembered again that Anne of Cleves was coming, and his black anger that Cromwell should thus once again have the King thrown back to him came out in his haughty and forbidding tone to Culpepper:

'Take thou my niece to the water-gate. I shall send women to her.' He hastened frostily up the path to be gone before Henry should return again.

Culpepper resolved that he would take barge before ever the Duke could send. But the mule slewed right across the terrace; his cousin grasped the brute's neck and her loosened hood began to fall back from her head.

The King, standing twenty yards away, with his hand shaking Cromwell's shoulder, was saying: 'See you how grey I grow.'

The words came hot into a long harangue. He had been urging that he must have more money for his works at Calais. He was agitated because a French chalk pit outside the English lines had been closed to his workmen. They must bring chalk from Dover at a heavy cost for barges and balingers. This was what it was to quarrel with France.

Cromwell had his mind upon widening the breach with France. He said that a poll tax might be levied on the subjects of Charles and Francis then in London. There were goldsmiths, woolstaplers, horse merchants, whore-masters, painters, musicians and vintners...

The King's eyes had wandered to the grey river, and then from a deep and moody abstraction he had blurted out those words.

Henry was very grey, and his face, inanimate and depressed, made him seem worn and old enough. Cromwell was not set to deny it. The King had his glass...

He sighed a little and began:

'The heavy years take their toll.'

Henry caught him up suddenly:

'Why, no. It is the heavy days, the endless nights. You can sleep, you.' But him, the King, incessant work was killing.

'You see, you see, how this world will never let me rest.' In the long, black nights he started from dozing. When he took time to dandle his little son a panic would come over him because he remembered that he lived among traitors and had no God he could pray to. He had no mind to work...

Cromwell said that there was no man in England could outwork his King.

'There is no man in England can love him.' His distracted eyes fell upon the woman on the mule. 'Happy he whom a King never saw and who never saw King,' he muttered.

The beast, inspired with a blind hatred of Culpepper, was jibbing across the terrace, close at hand. Henry became abstractedly interested in the struggle. The woman swayed forward over her knees.

'Your lady faints,' he called to Culpepper.

In his muddled fury the man began once again trying to hold her on the animal. It was backing slowly towards a stone seat in the balustrade, and man and woman swayed and tottered together.

The King said:

'Let her descend and rest upon the seat.'

His mind was swinging back already to his own heavy sorrows. On the stone seat the woman's head lay back upon the balustrade, her eyes were closed and her face livid to the sky. Culpepper, using his teeth to the finger ends, tore the gloves from his hands.

Henry drew Cromwell towards the gatehouse. He had it dimly in his mind to send one of his gentlemen to the assistance of that man and woman.

'Aye, teach me to sleep at night,' he said. 'It is you who make me work.'

'It is for your Highness' dear sake.'

'Aye, for my sake,' the King said angrily. He burst into a sudden invective: 'Thou hast murdered a many men ... for my sake. Thou hast found out plots that were no plots: old men hate me, old mothers, wives, maidens, harlots... Why, if I be damned at the end thou shalt escape, for what thou didst thou didst for my sake? Shall it be that?' He breathed heavily. 'My sins are thy glory.'

They reached the long wall of the gatehouse and turned mechanically. A barge at the river steps was disgorging musicians with lutes like half melons set on staves, horns that opened bell mouths to the sky, and cymbals that clanged in the rushing of the river. With his eyes upon them Henry said:

'A common man may commonly choose his bedfellow.' They had reminded him of the Queen for whose welcome they had been commanded.

Cromwell swept his hand composedly round the half horizon that held the palace, the grey river and the inlands.

'Your Highness may choose among ten thousand,' he answered.

The sound of a horn blown faintly to test it within the gatehouse, the tinkle of a lutestring, brought to the King's lips: 'Aye. Bring me music that shall charm my thoughts. You cannot do it.'

'A Queen is in the nature of a defence, a pledge, a cement, the keystone of a bulwark,' Cromwell said. 'We know now our friends and our foes. You may rest from this onwards.'

He spoke earnestly: This was the end of a long struggle. The King should have his rest.

They moved back along the terrace. The woman's head still lay back, her chin showed pointed and her neck, long, thin and supple. Culpepper was bending over her, sprinkling water out of his cap upon her upturned face.

The King said to Cromwell: 'Who is that wench?' and, in the same tone: 'Aye, you are a great comforter. We shall see how the cat jumps,' and then, answering his own question, 'Norfolk's niece?'

His body automatically grew upright, the limp disappeared from his gait and he moved sturdily and gently towards them.

Culpepper faced round like a wild cat from a piece of meat, but seeing the great hulk, the intent and friendly eyes, the gold collar over the chest, the heavy hands, and the great feet that appeared to hold down the very stones of the terrace, he stood rigid in a pose of disturbance.

'Why do ye travel?' the King asked. 'This shall be Katharine Howard?'

Culpepper's hushed but harsh voice answered that they came out of Lincolnshire on the Norfolk border. This was the Lord Edmund's daughter.

'I have never seen her,' the King said.

'Sh'ath never been in this town.'

The King laughed: 'Why, poor wench!'

'Sh'ath been well schooled,' Culpepper answered proudly, 'hath had mastern, hath sung, hath danced, hath your Latin and your Greek... Hath ten daughters, her father.'

The King laughed again: 'Why, poor man!'

'Poorer than ever now,' Culpepper muttered. Katharine Howard stirred uneasily and his face shot round to her. 'Rioters have brent his only house and wasted all his sheep.'

The King frowned heavily: 'Anan? Who rioted?'

'These knaves that love not our giving our ploughlands to sheep,' Culpepper said. 'They say they starved through it. Yet 'tis the only way to wealth. I had all my wealth by it. By now 'tis well gone, but I go to the wars to get me more.'

'Rioters?' the King said again, heavily.

'Twas a small tulzie – a score of starved yeomen here and there. I killed seven. The others were they that were hanged at Norwich... But the barns were brent, the sheep gone, and the house down and the servants fled. I am her cousin of the mother's side. Of as good a strain as Howards be.'

Henry, with his eyes still upon them, beckoned behind his back for Cromwell to come. A score or so of poor yeomen, hinds and women, cast out of their tenancies that wool might be grown for the Netherlands weavers, starving, desperate, and seeing no trace of might and order in their hidden lands, had banded, broken a few hedges and burnt a few barns before the posse of the country could come together and take them.

The King had not heard of it or had forgotten it, because such risings were so frequent. His brows came down into portentous and bulging knots, his eyes were veiled and threatening towards the woman's face. He had conceived that a great rebellion had been hidden from his knowledge.

She raised her head and shrieked at the sight of him, half started to her feet, and once more sank down on the bench, clasping at her cousin's hand. He said:

'Peace, Kate, it is the King.'

She answered: 'No, no,' and covered her face with her hands.

Henry bent a little towards her, indulgent, amused, and gentle as if to a child.

'I am Harry,' he said.

She muttered:

'There was a great crowd, a great cry. One smote me on the arm. And then this quiet here.'

She uncovered her face and sat looking at the ground. Her furs were all grey, she had had none new for four years, and they were tight to her young body that had grown into them. The roses embroidered on her glove had come unstitched, and, against the steely grey of the river, her face in its whiteness had the tint of mother of pearl and an expression of engrossed and grievous absence.

'I have fared on foul ways this journey,' she said.

'Thy father's barns we will build again,' the King answered. 'You shall have twice the sheep to your dower. Show me your eyes.'

'I had not thought to have seen the King so stern,' she answered.

Culpepper caught at the mule's bridle.

'Y' are mad,' he muttered. 'Let us begone.'

'Nay, in my day,' the King answered, 'y'ad found me more than kind.'

She raised her eyes to his face, steadfast, enquiring and unconcerned. He bent his great bulk downwards and kissed her upon the temple.

'Be welcome to this place.' He smiled with a pleasure in his own affability and because, since his beard had pricked her, she rubbed her cheek. Culpepper said:

'Come away. We stay the King's Highness.'

Henry said: 'Bide ye here.' He wished to hear what Cromwell might say of these Howards, and he took him down the terrace.

Culpepper bent over her with his mouth opened to whisper.

'I am weary,' she said. 'Set me a saddle cushion behind my shoulders.'

He whispered hurriedly:

'I do not like this place.'

'I like it well. Shall we not see brave shews?'

'The mule did stumble on the threshold.'

'I marked it not. The King did bid us bide here.'

She had once more laid her head back on the stone balustrade.

'If thou lovest me...' he whispered. It enraged and confused him to have to speak low. He could not think of any words.

She answered unconcernedly:

'If thou lovest my bones ... they ache and they ache.'

'I have sold farms to buy thee gowns,' he said desperately.

'I never asked it,' she answered coldly.

Henry was saying:

'Ah, Princes take as is brought them by others. Poor men be commonly at their own choice.' His voice had a sort of patient regret. 'Why brought ye not such a wench?'

Cromwell answered that in Lincoln, they said, she had been a coin that would not bear ringing.

'You do not love her house,' the King said. 'Y' had better have brought me such a one.'

Cromwell answered that his meaning was she had been won by others. The King's Highness should have her for a wink.

Henry raised his shoulders with a haughty and angry shrug. Such a quarry was below his stooping. He craved no light loves.

'I do not miscall the wench,' Cromwell answered. She was as her kind. The King's Highness should find them all of a make in England.

'Y' are foul-mouthed,' Henry said negligently. 'Tis a well-spoken wench. You shall find her a place in the Lady Mary's house.'

Cromwell smiled, and made a note upon a piece of paper that he pulled from his pocket.

Culpepper, his arms jerking angularly, was creaking out:

'Come away, a' God's name. By all our pacts. By all our secret vows.'

'Ay thou didst vow and didst vow,' she said with a bitter weariness. 'What hast to shew? I have slept in filthy beds all this journey. Speak the King well. He shall make thee at a word.'

He spat out at her.

'Is thine eye cocked up to that level?.. I am very hot, very choleric. Thou hast seen me. Thou shalt not live. I will slay thee. I shall do such things as make the moon turn bloody red.'

'Aye art thou there?' she answered coldly. 'Ye have me no longer upon lone heaths and moors. Mend thy tongue. Here I have good friends.'

Suddenly he began to entreat:

'Thy mule did stumble – an evil omen. Come away, come away. I know well thou lovest me.'

'I know well I love thee too well,' she answered, as if in scorn of herself.

'Come away to thy father.'

'Why what a bother is this,' she said. 'Thou wouldst to the wars to get thee gold? Thou wouldst trail a pike? Thou canst do little without the ear of some captain. Here is the great captain of them all.'

'I dare not speak here,' he muttered huskily. 'But this King...' He paused and added swiftly: 'He is of an ill omen to all Katharines.'

'Why, he shall give me his old gloves to darn,' she laughed. 'Fond knave, this King standeth on a mountain a league high. A King shall take notice of one for the duration of a raindrop's fall. Then it is done. One may make oneself ere it reach the ground, or never. Besides, 'tis a well-spoken elder. 'Tis the spit of our grandfather Culpepper.'

When Henry came hurrying back, engrossed, to send Culpepper and the mule to the gatehouse for a guide, she laughed gently for pleasure.

Culpepper said tremulously: 'She hath her father's commands to hasten to Dover.'

'Her father taketh and giveth commands from me,' Henry answered, and his glove flicked once more towards the gate. He had turned his face away before Culpepper's hand grasped convulsively at his dagger and he had Katharine Howard at his side sweeping back towards Cromwell.

She asked, confidingly and curiously: 'Who is that lord?' and, after his answer, she mused, 'He is no friend to Howards.'

'Nay, that man taketh his friends among mine,' he answered. He stopped to regard her, his face one heavy and indulgent smile. The garter on his knee, broad and golden, showed her the words: '*Y pense*'; the collars moved up and down on his immense chest, the needlework of roses was so fine that she wondered how many women had sat up how many nights to finish it: but the man was grey and homely.

'I know none of your ways here,' she said.

'Never let fear blanch thy cheeks till we are no more thy friend,' he reassured her. He composed one of his gallant speeches:

'Here lives for thee nothing but joy.' Pleasurable hopes should be her comrades while the jolly sun shone, and sweet content at night her bedfellow...

He handed her to the care of the Lord Cromwell to take her to the Lady Mary's lodgings. It was unfitting that she should walk with him, and, with his heavy and bearlike gait, swinging his immense shoulders, he preceded them up the broad path.

VI

Cromwell watched the King's great back with an attentive smile. He said, ironically, that he was her ladyship's servant.

'I would ye were,' she answered. 'They say you love not those that I love.'

'I would have you not heed what men say,' he answered, grimly. 'I am douce to those that be of good-will to his Highness. Those that hate me are his ill-wishers.'

'Then the times are evil,' she said, 'for they are many.'

She added suddenly, as if she could not keep a prudent silence:

'I am for the Old Faith in the Old Way. You have hanged many dear friends of mine whose souls I pray for.'

He looked at her attentively.

She had a supple, long body, a fair-tinted face, fair and reddish hair, and eyes that had a glint of almond green – but her cheeks were flushed and her eyes sparkled. She was so intent upon speaking her mind that she had forgotten the pain of her arm. She thought that she must have said enough to anger this brewer's son. But he answered only:

'I think you have never been in the King's court' – and, from his tranquil manner, she realised very suddenly that this man was not the dirt beneath her feet.

She had never been in the King's court; she had never, indeed, been out of the North parts. Her father had always been a very poor man, with an ancient castle and a small estate that he had nearly always neglected because it had not paid for the farming. Living men she had never respected – for they seemed to her like wild beasts when she compared them with such of the ancients as Brutus or as Seneca. She had been made love to and threatened by such men as her cousin; she had been made love to and taught Latin by her pedagogues. She was more learned than any man she had ever met – and, thinking upon the heroes of Plutarch, she found the present times despicable. She hardly owed allegiance to the King. Now she had seen him and felt his consciousness of his own power, she was less certain. But the King's writs had hardly run in the Northern parts. Her men-folk and her mother's people had hanged their own peasants when they thought fit. She had seen bodies swinging from tree-tops when she rode hawking. All that she had ever known of the King's power was when the convent by their castle gates had been thrown out of doors, and then her men-folk, cursing and raging, had sworn that it was the work of Crummock. 'Knaves ruled about the King.'

If knaves ruled about him, the King was not a man that one need trouble much over. Her own men-folk, she knew, had made and unmade Kings. So that, when she thought of the hosts of saints and of the blessed angels that hovered, wringing their hands and weeping above England, she had wondered a little at times why they had never unmade this King.

But to her all these things had seemed very far away. She had nothing to do but to read books in the learned tongues, to imagine herself holding disquisitions upon the spiritual republic of Plato, to ride, to shoot with the bow, to do needlework, or to chide the maids. Her cousin had loved her passionately; it was true that once, when she had had nothing to her back, he had sold a farm to buy her a gown. But he had menaced her with his knife till she was weary, and the ways of men were troublesome to her; nevertheless she submitted to them with a patient wisdom.

She submitted to the King; she submitted – though she hated him by repute – to Cromwell's catechism as they followed the King at a decent interval.

He walked beside her with his eyes on her face. He spoke of the King's bounty in a voice that implied his own power. She was to be the Lady Mary's woman. He had that lady especially in his good will, he saved for her household ladies of egregious gifts, presence and attainments. They received liberal honorariums, seven dresses by the year, vails, presents, perfumes from the King's own still-

rooms, and a parcel-gilt chain at the New Year. The Lady Rochford, who ruled over these ladies, was kind, courteous, free in her graces as in the liberties she allowed the ladies under her easy charge.

He enlarged upon this picture as if it were a bribe that he alone could offer or withhold. And something at once cautious and priestly in his tone let her quick intuition know that he was both warning her and sounding her, to see how far her mutinous spirit would carry her. Once he said, 'There must be tranquillity in the kingdom. The times are very evil!'

She had felt very quickly that insults to this man would be a useless folly. He could not even feel them, and she kept her eyes on the ground and listened to him.

He went on sounding her. It was part of his profession of kingcraft to know the secret hearts of every person with whom he spoke.

'And your goodly cousin?' He paused. The King had commanded that a place should be found for him. 'Should he be best at Calais? There shall be blows struck there.'

She knew very well that he was trying to discover how much she loved her cousin, and she answered in a low voice, 'I would have him stay here. He is the sole friend I have in this place.'

Cromwell said, with a hidden and encouraging meaning, her cousin was not her only friend there.

'Aye, but your lordship is not so old a friend as he.'

'Not me. Call me your good servant.'

'There is even then my uncle.'

'Little good of a friend you will have of Norfolk. 'Tis a bitter apple and a very rotten plank to lean upon.'

She could not any longer miss his meaning. The King's scarlet and immense figure was already in the grey shadow of the arch under the tower. In walking, they had come near him, and while they waited he stood for a minute, gazing back down the path with boding and pathetic eyes; then he disappeared.

She looked at Cromwell and thanked him for the warning, '*quia spicula praevisa minus laedunt*.'

'I would have you read it: *gaudia plus laetificant*,' he answered gravely.

A man with a conch-shaped horn upturned was suddenly blowing beneath the archway seven hollow and reverberating grunts of sound that drowned his voice. A clear answering whistle came from the water-gate. Cromwell stayed, listening attentively; another stood forward to blow four blasts, another six, another three. Each time the whistle answered. They were the great officers' signals for their barges that the men blew, and the whistle signified that these lay at readiness in the tideway. A bustle of men running, calling, and making pennons ready, began beyond the archway in the quadrangle.

Cromwell's face grew calm and contented; the King was sending to meet Anne of Cleves.

'Y' are well read?' he asked her slowly.

'I was brought up in the Latin tongue or ever I had the English,' she answered. 'I had a good master, one that spoke the learned language always.'

'Aye, Nicholas Udal,' Cromwell said.

'You know all men in the land,' she said, with fear and surprise.

'I had him to master for the Lady Mary, since he is well disposed.'

'Tis an arrant knave tho' the best of pedagogues,' she answered. 'He was cast out of his mastership at Eton for being a rogue.'

'For that, the worshipful your father had him to master,' he said ironically.

'No, for that he was a ruined man, and taught for his victuals. We welly starved at home, my sisters and I.'

He said slowly:

'The better need that you should grow beloved here.'

Standing there, before the bushes where no ears could overhear, he put to her more questions. She had some Greek, more than a little French, she could judge a good song, she could turn a verse in Latin or the vulgar tongue. She professed to be able to ride well, to be conversant with the terms of venery, to shoot with the bow, and to have studied the Fathers of the Church.

'These things are well liked in high places,' he said. 'His Highness' self speaks five tongues, loveth a nimble answer, and is a noble huntsman.' He surveyed her as if she were a horse he were pricing. 'But I doubt not you have appraised yourself passing well,' he uttered.

'I have had some to make me pleasant speeches,' she answered, 'but too many cannot be had.'

'See you,' he said slowly, 'these tuckets that they blow from the gate signify that the new Queen cometh with a great state.' He bit his under lip and looked at her meaningly. 'But a great state ensueth a great heaviness to the head of the State. *Principis hymen, principium gravitatis*... 'Tis a small matter to me; you may make it a great one to your ladyship's light fortunes.'

She knew that he awaited her saying:

'I do not take your lordship,' and she pulled the hood further over her face because it was cold, and uttered the words with her eyes on the ground.

'Why,' he said readily, 'you are a lady having gifts that are much in favour in these days. Be careful to use those gifts and no others. Meddle in nothing that does not concern you. So you may make a great marriage with some lord in favour. But meddle in naught else!'

She would find many to set her an evil example. The other ladies amongst whom she was going were a mutinous knot. Let her be careful! If by her good behaviour she earned it, he would put the King in mind to advance her. If by good speeches and good example – since she had great store of learning – she could turn the hearts of these wicked ladies; if she could report to him evil designs or plots, he would speak to the King in such wise that His Highness should give her a great dower and any lord would marry her. Or he would advance her cousin so that he should become marriageable.

She said submissively:

'Your lordship would have me become a spy upon the ladies who shall be my fellows?'

He waved his hand with a large and calming gesture.

'I would have you work for the good of the State as you find it,' he said gravely. 'That, too, is a doctrine of the Ancients.' He cited the case of Seneca, who supported the government of Nero, and she noted that he twisted to suit his purpose Tacitus' account of the soldiers of that same Prince.

Nevertheless, she made no comment. For she knew that it is the nature of men calmly to ask hateful sacrifices of women. But her throat ached with rage. And when she followed him along the corridors of the palace she seemed to feel that each man, each woman that they passed hated that lord with a hatred born of fear.

He walked in front of her arrogantly, as if she were a straw to be drawn along in the wind of his progress. Doors flew open at a flick of his finger.

Suddenly they were in a tall room, long, and dim because it faced the north. It seemed an empty cavern, but there were in it many books upon a long table and at the far end, so that they looked quite small, two figures stood before a reading-pulpit. The voice of the serving man who had thrown open the door made the words 'The Lord Privy Seal of England' echo mournfully along the gilded and dim rafters of the ceiling.

Cromwell hastened over the smooth, cold floor. The woman's figure in black, the long tail of her hood falling almost to her feet like a widow's veil, turned from the pulpit; a man remained bent down at his reading.

'*Annuntio vobis gaudium magnum*,' Cromwell's voice uttered. The lady stood, rigid and straight, her hands clasped before her. Her face, pale so that not even a touch of red showed above the cheekbones and hardly any in the tightly-pursed lips, was as if framed in her black hood that fastened beneath the chin. The high, narrow forehead had the hair tightly drawn back so that none was visible, and the coif that showed beneath the hood was white, like a nun's; the temples were hollowed so

that she looked careworn inexpressibly, and her lips had hard lines around them. Above her head all sounds in that dim room seemed to whisper for a long time among the rafters as if here dwelt something mysterious, sepulchral, a great grief or a great passion.

'I announce to you a master-joy,' Cromwell was saying. 'I bring your La'ship a damsel of great erudition and knowledge of good letters.'

His voice was playful and full; his back was bent supply. His face lit up with a debonnaire and pleasant smile. The lady's eyes turned upon the girl, forbidding and suspicious; she remained motionless, even her lips did not move. Cromwell said that this was a Katharine of the Howards, and one fit to aid her Ladyship and Magister Udal with their erudite commentary of Plautus his works.

The man at the reading desk looked round and then back at his book. His pen scratched upon the margin of a great volume. Katharine Howard was upon her knees grasping at the lady's hand to kiss it. But it was snatched roughly away.

'This is a folly,' the voice came harshly from the pursed lips. 'Get up, wench.' Katharine remained kneeling. For this was the Lady Mary of England – a martyr for whom she had prayed nightly since she could pray.

'Get up, fool,' the voice said above her head. 'It is proclaimed treason to kneel to me. This is to risk your neck to act thus before Privy Seal.'

The hard words were aimed straight at the face of Cromwell.

'Your ladyship knows well I would fain have it otherwise,' he answered softly.

'I do not ask it,' she answered.

He maintained a gentle smile of deprecation, beckoning a little with his head and with his eyes, begging her for private conversation. She lifted Katharine roughly to her feet and followed him to a distant window. She seemed as if she were an automaton without will or independent motions of her own, so small were her steps and her feet so hidden beneath her stiff black skirts. He began talking to her in a voice of which only the persuasive higher notes came into the room.

At that time she was still proclaimed bastard, and her name was erased from the list of those it was lawful to pray for in the churches. At times she endured great hardships, even to going short of food, for she suffered from a wasting complaint that made her a great eater. But starvation could not make her submit to the King, her father, or to the Lord Cromwell who was ruler in the land. Sometimes they gave her a great train, strove to make her dress herself richly, and dragged her to such festivals as this of the marriage with Anne of Cleves. This was done when the Lord Privy Seal dangled her before the eyes of the Emperor of France as a match; then it was necessary to increase the appearance of her worth in England. But sometimes the King, out of a warm and generous feeling of satisfaction with his young son, was moved to behave bountifully to his daughter, and, seeking to dazzle her with his munificence, gave her golden crosses and learned books annotated with his own hand, richly jewelled and with embroidered covers. Or when the Emperor, her cousin, interceded that she should be treated more kindly, she was threatened with the block. Of late Cromwell had set himself to gain her heart with his intrigue that he could make so smooth and with his air that could be so gentle – that the King found so lovable. But nothing moved her to set her hand to a deed countenancing her dead mother's disgrace; to smile upon her father and his minister, who had devised the means for casting down her mother; or to consent to relinquish her right to the throne. So that at times, when the cloud of the Church abroad, and of the rebellions all over the extremities of the kingdoms, threatened very greatly, the King was driven to agonies of fear and rage lest his enemies or his subjects should displace him who was excommunicated and set her, whom all Catholics regarded as undergoing a martyrdom, on his throne. He feared her sometimes so much that it was only Cromwell that saved her from death. Cromwell would spend hours of his busy days in the long window of her work room, urging her to submission, dilating upon the powers that might be hers, studying her tastes to devise bribes for her. It was with that aim, because her whole days in her solitude were given to the learned writers, that he had sought out for her Magister Udal as a companion and preceptor who might both please her with

his erudition and induce her to look kindly upon the New Learning and a more lax habit of mind. But she never thanked Cromwell. Whilst he talked she remained frozen and silent. At times, under the spur of a cold rage, she said harsh things of himself and her father, calling upon the memory of her mother and the wrongs her Church had suffered – and, on his departing, before he had even left the room she would return, frigidly and without change of face, to the book upon her desk.

So the Privy Seal talked to her by the window for the fiftieth time. Katharine Howard saw, before the high reading pulpit, the back of a man in the long robes of a Master of Arts. He held a pen in his hand and turned over his shoulder at her a face thin, brown, humorous and deprecatory, as if he were used to bearing chiding with philosophy.

'Magister Udal!' she uttered.

He motioned with his mouth for her to be silent, but pointed with the feather of his quill to a line of a little book that lay upon the pulpit near his elbow. She came closer to read:

'*Circumspectatrix cum oculis emisitiis!*' and written above it in a minute hand: 'A spie with eyes that peer about and stick out.'

He pointed over his shoulder at the Lord Privy Seal.

'How poor this room is, for a King's daughter!' she said, without much dropping her voice.

He hissed: 'Hush! hush!' with an appearance of terror, and whispered, forming the words with his lips rather than uttering them: 'How fared you and your house in the nonce?'

'I have read in many texts,' she answered, 'to pass the heavy hours.'

He spoke then, aloud and with an admonitory air:

'Never say the heavy hours – for what hours are heavy that can be spent with the ancient writers for companions?'

She avoided his reproachful eyes with:

'My father's house was burnt last month; my cousin Culpepper is in the courts below. Dear Nick Ardham, with his lute, is dead an outlaw beyond sea, and Sir Ferris was hanged at Doncaster – both after last year's rising, pray all good men that God assail them!'

Udal muttered:

'Hush, for God's dear sake. That is treason here. There is a listener behind the hangings.'

He began to scrawl hastily with a dry pen that he had not time to dip in the well of ink. The shadow of the Lord Cromwell's silent return was cast upon them both, and Katharine shivered.

He said harshly to the magister:

'I will that you write me an interlude in the vulgar tongue in three days' time. Such a piece as being spoken by skilful players may make a sad man laugh.'

Udal said: 'Well-a-day!'

'It shall get you advancement. I am minded the piece shall be given at my house before his Highness and the new Queen in a week.'

Udal remained silent, dejected, his head resting upon his breast.

'For,' Cromwell spoke with a raised voice, 'it is well that the King be distracted of his griefs.' He went on as if he were uttering an admonition that he meant should be heeded and repeated. The times were very evil with risings, mutinies in close fortresses, schism, and the bad hearts of men. Here, therefore, he would that the King should find distraction. Such of them as had gifts should display those talents for his beguiling; such of them as had beauty should make valuable that beauty; others whose wealth could provide them with rich garments and pleasant displays should work, each man and each woman, after his sort or hers. 'And I will that you report my words where either of you have resort. Who loves me shall hear it; who fears me shall take warning.'

He surveyed both Katharine and the master with a heavy and encouraging glance, having the air of offering great things if they aided him and avoided dealing with his enemies.

The Lady Mary was gliding towards them like a cold shadow casting itself upon his warm words; she would have ignored him altogether, knowing that contempt is harder to bear than bitter

speeches. But the fascination of hatred made it hard to keep aloof from her father's instrument. He looked negligently over his shoulder and was gone before she could speak. He did not care to hear more bitter words that could make the breach between them only wider, since words once spoken are so hard to wash away, and the bringing of this bitter woman back to obedience to her father was so great a part of his religion of kingcraft. In that, when it came, there should be nothing but concord and oblivion of bitter speeches, silent loyalty, and a throne upheld, revered, and unassailable.

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