

The Queen's Caprice

The tempestuous story of Mary Stuart—ill-fated Queen of Scots

Marjorie Bowen



<http://epubebookeditions.com.au>

*This site is full of FREE ebooks - Check them out at our Home page -
Project Gutenberg Australia <http://gutenberg.net.au>*

Title: The Queen's Caprice

Author: Marjorie Bowen

* A Project Gutenberg Australia eBook *

eBook No.: 0800641.txt

Language: English

Date first posted: July 2008

Date most recently updated: July 2008

Project Gutenberg Australia eBooks are created from printed editions which are in the public domain in Australia, unless a copyright notice is included. We do NOT keep any eBooks in compliance with a particular paper edition.

Copyright laws are changing all over the world. Be sure to check the copyright laws for your country before downloading or redistributing this file.

This eBook is made available at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg Australia License which may be viewed online at <http://gutenberg.net.au/licence.html>

To contact Project Gutenberg Australia go to <http://gutenberg.net.au>

The Queen's Caprice

Marjorie Bowen

First published 1933, under a pseudonym: George R Preedy

* * *

Author's Note

Tim foregoing novel contains what the author believes to be the essence of the truth of the reign and character of Mary, Queen of Scotland. It is, however, to be read as a work of fiction, since it is an imaginary reconstruction of events and characters which must always remain perplexing, debated, and obscure. There is no invented person in the tale, and the sequence of historical events is strictly followed.

When the author first decided on this subject for a work of fiction, she found the familiar story she had selected so mysterious, confused, and incredible, related so often with such passion and prejudice, and so disfigured by spite, sentimentality, and political bias, that she resolved to turn to all the original documents concerning the Queen of Scotland and discover for herself, if possible, the facts on which so much fiction has been based, and to make her own deductions therefrom. Whatever, therefore, this tale may be, it is not a superficial fantasy but the result of an earnest attempt to come at the solution of a very curious historical puzzle.

Period covered by "THE QUEEN'S CAPRICE"

February 1565-June 1567, Detailed as follows:

The Queen's first meeting with Lord Darnley, Wemyss Castle 16th
February 1565 Private marriage of the Queen and Lord Darnley,
Stirling Castle March 1565 Public marriage, Holyrood 29th July 1565
Murder of David Rizzio 9th March 1566 Birth of the Prince 19th June
1566 Murder of King Henry (Lord Darnley) 10th February 1567
Marriage of the Queen and Bothwell 15th May 1567 Carberry Hill 5th
June 1567 The Queen sent to Lochleven 16th June 1567

* * *

Contents:

- 1 The Crimson Wedding Ring
- 2 The Violet-Brown Bed
- 3 The Rose Tree at Loch Leven

* * *

"Bloody Bothwell hath brought our King to death
From flattering Fraud with double Dallilay."

--Lampoon, 1567.

"You live in a rank pasture, here i' the Court
There is a kind of honeydew that's deadly.
Twill poison your fame; look to 't, be not cunning
For they whose faces do belie their hearts
Are witches ere they arrive at twenty years
Ay, and give the Devil suck."

--John Webster.

* * *

PART 1 - The Crimson Wedding Ring

"Love's limits are ample and great; and a spacious walk it bath, beset with Thoms,"

—Democritus Junior.

1. The Crimson Wedding Ring

The tall man stood alone under the tattered, wintry tree. A mist wrapped the high-seated city between the palace in the east and the castle in the west. When he moistened his lips he could taste the salted vapours which came from the sea. On his frieze coat were drops of moisture, the linen round his neck was limp. His thoughts tormented him, like malignant fingers plucking at his heart. He had come to this desolate place to be away from the thriftless chatter of the Abbey.

But his perplexities crowded about him in the barren solitude. He stood so still that a hare limped through the circle of dim light which bounded him, and the creature's bulging eyes fixed him for a second. He was startled, and forgetting how long it was since he had been a priest, raised his hand to make the Holy Sign. As his fingers dropped to his side the hare limped away. There seemed a sigh in the thick vapours that began to be shot with darkness. Behind the castle, the unseen sun was declining, leaving him in gloom.

The thoughtful man moved slowly from under the tree. He was afraid of devilry, and his strong mind chafed at his fears. He longed to be free of all superstitions, yet he moved always warily, in terror of spells and the diabolical enchantments of the unknown world that pressed

so close about the senses. As he went sullenly towards the Abbey, squares of coloured light showed the windows. He was irritated with himself because his problems were unsolved even by his intense meditation. He had endeavoured to understand himself, his ambition, his faith, his desires, his hopes, but he had failed, because unacknowledged lusts and treacheries stirred and, like devils, put themselves between him and his earnest thoughts.

One fact, splendid and hideous, stained the fabric of his fortunes. He was a King's bastard, and one of noble birth, even by the unwed mother's side. This irony was underlined because he knew himself possessed of royal qualities, and very capable of government.

As he entered the gardens, the outline of the Abbey appeared vaguely dark against the blurred light. The well-kept gardens with wattled beds, trellis work, summer-houses and gravel paths were neat and barren as a set-geometric design; the bare trees made a brittle tracery against the vanishing fleeces of the mist, that curdled as the upper wind from Leith drew them away.

The man paused; he was vexed by his own indecision. He wanted all that a violently changed world had to offer, but, so rapid was progress, so eager was his desire to be in the forefront of all that was new, that he scarcely knew what this was. He took off his hat impatiently and, twisted it in his hand, allowing the transient light to fall over his strong face, with the eyes slightly swollen from overwork, the pale, healthy complexion, the sullen lines round heavy jowl and mouth.

"To save her or to destroy her?"

He was startled by this thought, so powerful that it almost forced itself into words. But he faced it grimly with the courage that he always turned to an enemy.

"Destroy her?" He believed that he could do it; he had never found his own equal in craft, daring, coolness, mastery of men. "Destroy her while she is unwed, a flower without root or fruit--"

A sudden tenderness overwhelmed him at the touch of his own wistful simile. A tall, pale flower with fair petals spread--she was like that; he had always had an instinct to guard her, warring with an instinct to put her out of his way. Sometimes he was ashamed of this affection, which seemed too warm for a brother towards a sister. There had been moments when he had dwelt on old stories of times when kings had married their sisters. Then he had become alarmed and believed himself bewitched, outcast from salvation.

Was not this voluptuous, secret tenderness a reason for destroying her? For his soul's sake it would be better that this sweet, precious creature should be plucked, cast down, and left to wither.

Yet, to serve her was not so ill a task. She had allowed him a free hand, she had never tried to check his passionate avarice, his grim ambition, she had given him honours lavishly. And sometimes she had looked at him as if she too felt a warm, hidden tenderness for him that was different from sisterly trust or respect. With his problems unsolved and lying wearily on his mind, the man entered the dark building, where taper lights were fluttering in many heated, noisy chambers.

In the room where he did his business, the King's bastard son stood before the fire, deep in thought, but his inability to concentrate caused him to raise his hand and let it fall with vexation. As the door opened he turned, ready with a sharp rebuke for the intruder, but did not speak when he saw William Maitland enter. This was the only man in Scotland whom he considered his intellectual peer, but Moray was confident that he could best even Maitland if he wished.

Maitland smiled and came to the fire; he was very elegant and had the air of belonging exactly to his own time; all he did and said seemed fresh, tolerant, easy, free of the shackles of tradition, convention, or prejudice. His clothes were always in some whim of fashion that set them apart from the routine attire of other men, but never ostentatious nor fantastic. There was about him a fine essence of breeding, courtesy, accomplishment and exquisite mockery which the other man envied. Yet there was also a fickleness, a lightness and an inconstancy that the other man, anchored to stable ambitions and rigid principles, despised.

"A cold, wet night," said Maitland softly. "It is good to see even a small fire. Where have you been, Lord Moray? Wandering away from my corrupt counsel?"

"I have been taking my own. You know there is nothing but that, to see clearly for oneself and to act thereon."

"Do you see clearly?"

"No."

"I do. I could tell you your thoughts."

"I have never tried to conceal them from you," replied Moray dryly; yet he flattered himself that his closest secrets were hidden deep, even from this acute observer. A little smile of satisfaction touched his pale sensual mouth. "Come, what is it that you see so clearly?"

"That while we can serve the lady, we can never serve the lady's husband."

"You bring us, then, to a dead end. For the lady must be wed." Moray liked this plain, dangerous speaking; his slanting brown eyes turned

eagerly to the smooth, inscrutable face of his companion who was leaning against the mantelpiece and gazing with a gentle expression into the flames.

"Must be wed," repeated Moray. "Come, we have no concealments, you and I, Maitland. Could we, by any subtlety, device or intricacy of argument, keep her without a husband? Come, you excel in such difficulties."

"Keep her without a husband, yes," smiled Maitland. "Keep her chaste, no. And will the godly, sir, endure a wanton, wilful Queen?"

"I would keep within the terms of honour." Moray could not resist the useless rebuke.

"Sometimes you speak like a boy. Was her father cold-blooded?" Maitland smiled. "If he had been you would never have seen the light. She is a warm, sweet creature. She is also set in authority. Can your policies keep her from lovers?"

Moray did not answer, he was angered at this turn of the clear, mocking talk.

"You are not nimble enough, I think, to defeat her always. I believe twice already it has been rumoured--John Gordon and Pierre de Chastelard, eh?"

"It was, through my care, hushed up, glossed over."

"The third time it may not be so easy."

"This is grievous, jarring talk. Upon my soul, I know not what to do. If we could find some careful fool whom I could manage--"

"You have had some proposed--Arran, who is an imbecile; Don

Carlos, who is a lunatic; the Englishman, Dudley, whom I take to be a blockhead; this Lennox boy, a silly child."

"Maitland, all this gets us nowhere. Advise me, I take you to be the only man of free mind in Scotland. Help me if you can." Moray spoke with great energy, then, seeing the other's amused glance, he added sharply: "You know that no one can reward you better."

"The Queen might," smiled Maitland. "I love her myself, as much as any man might. Why should I not put her high and keep her there, as Cecil put and keeps Elizabeth?"

"Because I am in the way!" Moray's answering smile was sour. "And my sister is not that manner of woman."

"Sister!" repeated Maitland lightly. "There's the canker. You ought to marry her yourself--the two of you together, now--"

Moray felt a prick of loathing towards this man who understood him better than anyone else, but whom he had thought did not understand this one thing. He said, very slowly:

"With such a woman I could have ruled Scotland very well. I cannot rule with her and a husband--"

A light, malicious amusement ran, like light, over Maitland's elegant face.

"Choose her a husband who can rule without you, then. Cease to tame her, let her have her liberty--with another prince."

The King's son replied with a piercing sincerity: "There is no such man. No one could do it like I can. You know that I should be King."

Maitland conceded that bitter claim.

"Yes. But she is there. Now it is all very well. She endures your advice very prettily, she leans to you in everything, but when she takes a husband it will be quite different. You will be jealous. Not only for your lost power."

"Not only?" repeated Moray, irked by these words.

In a soft tone and looking sideways, Maitland said: "You were glad to see her two lovers--her would-be lovers then!--on the scaffold. So was I. But what we try to do is impossible. Some lascivious fool will come along and snatch her from both of us--my delicious Queen, your exquisite sister."

Moray's face flushed, to his own vexation, yet Maitland's talk excited him and he would not stop it; he glanced at the window as if he feared spies.

"But," added Maitland, "no one, whatever his merit or his vice will keep her long. He who drinks in jewels one day, the next will use his hand."

"Ah!" cried Moray quickly. "There is your solution--I thought of that."

Maitland nodded.

"Let her marry--since you cannot prevent it. A Queen's husband is not to be envied. It will not be I nor you who will be troubled with his removal--his advancement will consume him."

Moray wiped his forehead; the fire was really very hot, the small room stuffy; he thought of the hare with staring eyes, he thought of a cursing witch burning in flames. He longed for relief from the tension; he turned his urgent face to Maitland, who remained cool and unaltered.

"If there should be a child, you could rule through that and outbrave them all. Steward and lord in one." Moray made an instinctive movement of repugnance.

"If I took one husband from her she would find another, by reason of her graces and her faults." Moray seemed to sink within himself, to utter these words without his own volition.

"If she is not very careful she will not be able to save herself from scandal," whispered Maitland, almost on a sigh.

"Would you not be sorry?" he demanded harshly. "Yes, but I should not be able to help her."

The King's bastard clutched the arms of his chair, his chin sank on his breast.

"Do you think that anyone can help her?"

"No."

"Not if she married--someone who, beyond sensuality, loved her?"

"No one," whispered Maitland, "will ever love her like that. Besides, you would always be there."

"Yes," admitted Moray, as if answering an accusation.

"You cannot give way. You ought to be King." Maitland shrugged, spread his hands in an Italianate gesture. "No one will be able to forget that. Why do you concern yourself so about her husband? Whoever he is, you'll be able to manage him. You've the people, the Church, you've skill, argument, God behind you. She is an alien, an idolatress. Everyone suspects her, no one likes her very much. She

is not really clever, one might say that she knows nothing. Nothing but tricks."

Moray looked up; there was appeal in the long eyes between the swollen lids.

"I want to save her. I feel, sorry. You understand? I would like to see her safe. Just because she is so helpless--with her tricks."

"You cannot do it!" Maitland's smile was unexpectedly bitter; in the leaping light his face looked worn, puffy and yellow. "Everything is stupid, empty and filthy. We know that. What spoils or trophies can we handle that are not smirched with rottenness?"

"There is God," groaned Moray obstinately.

"Yes, that is curious." Maitland's thin brows went up. "God. But you want power, money. You want to rule this rock with its half-million people, most of whom are low enough, and the girl is in your way. What has God to do with your uncertainties?"

"I believe--" began Moray, as if he recited a creed.

"Oh, yes, in John Calvin. So does she in her idols and her priests and the Bishop of Rome. What does it matter?"

"I am doing it for the benefit of Scotland." Moray's tone was firmer. "I know what the people want--they may be bloody and bestial, false and lustful, but there has been a light set among them--the Holy Gospel, I think of that."

He stood up, and even in his plain dress, with the crumpled collar that might have been that of a humble official, he seemed to have the aspect of a prince. There was a definite quality emanating from his ancient blood that Maitland much admired, an air of tormented

greatness that Moray usually kept repressed.

"You are right--a sharp, cold rock with poor savages," he said thickly. He saw a visionary landscape, an island, broken into rugged shapes over which the elements warred, distant hostile mountains, lakes of blackish water, the master city between the impregnable castle and the palace, with open fields about and armed towers surrounding it; in the north other cities, gloomy, melancholy, full of men eager with a restless purpose. Over this a foreign girl ruled; with indifferent grace she played with brilliant toys. He flushed when he considered her and his mind swayed to thoughts of witchcraft again, and to the wizened face of the hare peering, with lifted upper lip, through the drizzle of the mist. His vision toppled, he stared into the clear flames on the hearth. What a large fire they had built up! He winced away, thinking of the burning of sorcerers, but he stared, greedily, like a glutton, at his future fortunes. He wanted Scotland, all of it; there was no one who had a right to dispute it with him, none. There was only Maitland, clever, courteous, slippery, useful, who did not quite believe in God, who did not care much for reward, but who would work very willingly for love of the game, if it were difficult enough. The others were brutes, bloody, filthy, or blockheads, dolts, unable to control themselves, shameless, violent men. But he could master all of them. God might help him to do so. He, bred a Papist priest, had turned from the abominable darkness of that Roman error and received the truth. Had ambition helped there? The absolute need to be on the winning side urged him? He would not think so. Nor would he remember that he was gorged with Church lands; he turned cunningly from any possible censure on himself. He glanced up sharply to see Maitland gazing Maitland gazing at him, with curiosity and a gentle compassion. This gaze inflamed Moray, but his anger flared away; he smiled uneasily.

"It is all ridiculous and trivial," said Maitland pleasantly, "but as there is little else to do, we may as well continue--the unrest is past cure,

but we may allay the itch."

"We have decided on nothing."

"It is useless for us to decide. You cannot always control her. Nor for much longer. Does she even like you?" mused Maitland softly. "I wonder."

"She has no power," said Moray, as if excusing himself. "She never could have."

"Except to make mischief," added the other, "except to destroy herself." His smooth face twitched in slight nervousness. Sometimes he was afraid of the future he was making for himself. He was a man of peace, who loved comfort and ease, yet everything he meddled in turned to war and violence, blood and storm. But he could not withdraw from all the tumult and live in the country, writing verses as his father did so contentedly. He must interfere with the greatest affairs he knew of, he must fawn on the King's bastard because there was not his peer in Scotland. He must want to serve the Queen merely because everyone wanted to be near her, to stare at her, to scheme and intrigue, to make use of her youth and silliness and amorous temper, he must a little love the Queen, content to be her drudge, because she was so high and not for him.

"The century is not worthy of us," he smiled gravely.

He crossed to the window and looked out into the dusk. A low, thin moon that seemed decayed hung over the bare trees and gave a reluctant light. He thought of the Queen--she was never long out of his mind. He understood this complex creature who was a mystery to some and whom others did not trouble to study. He knew all her faults and did not blame them. If he had been in her half-brother's place he could have managed her better. Moray was a zealot, or

pretended to be, and seldom laughed--his humour was bleak and acid. But he, Sir William Maitland of Lethington, would have known how to deal with that brittle, brilliant woman with her warm blood and shallow mind--if he had been a prince.

Moray had another weakness that surprised Maitland--his dreadful fear of sorcery. Sometimes he thought that the Queen, whom Maitland could read so well as a woman of the earth, was an enchantress or one who dealt in spells. Maitland smiled at this, but secretly, for he was perhaps the only man in Scotland to despise such superstitions.

"Why do you stare out at the moon?" asked Moray harshly. Maitland knew that he thought of Hecate and her terrors of the dark, and so asked:

"Do you take me for a wizard?"

"There are such, close about us," complained Moray, "more than I care to name. The thought of them is like the fear of the plague to me."

"I am not infected." Maitland left the window. "You know that she met Lennox's son at Wemyss?"

"What has she said about him?"

"Nothing. Where she is touched deep, she is dumb."

"I shall make her speak."

Moray walked through the narrow passages and long low rooms, the cramped ante-chambers and twisting staircases of the Abbey of Holy Cross, named sometimes Holy Rood, which was a palace, a ruined church, and a royal burial ground set in pleasure gardens and

a park full of hunting coverts. All the windows that he passed were shrouded by curtains of stiff leather. Lamps and candles were plentiful so that, save for the biting air, it might have been summer.

When he reached the Queen's apartments he found that she was in bed, not for any sickness, but merely resting.

She was sunk in a huge bed filled with silk mattresses and down pillows. The elaborate bed furniture was a shot of red and yellow, with the rugged lion and border of little enclosed in a diamond shape. The Queen wore a little ermine cape and the coverlets were turned down to her waist.

When she saw her half-brother she sat up and gave him her hand. The atmosphere was drowsy, the candlelight left the room in shadow; on a cushion in front of the deep-set fire sat Mary Seaton, stringing perfumed beads into a bracelet. Her face was pure, with a remote expression, like that of a nun. Moray took the chair of watered silk by the bed; he knew that his harsh attire, his heavy frame, his weary face were out of place in this enervating chamber.

The Queen looked at him in a modest silence. Her glance seemed to entreat, almost to fawn. Under the ermine mantle that fell open because of its weight, her bosom and shoulders, white as a privet bud, showed beneath a gauze shift. Her hair, the hue of a crimson lily when it fades from splendour in autumn, was dark and crimped behind a golden caul.

With a flattering humility she touched her half-brother's strong hand where it rested on the arm of the chair and asked him if he were angry with her.

They always spoke in French for she knew little Scots or English; her voice was sweetly tuned and Moray could never hear it unmoved.

"We have too much idle talk," he said stiffly.

"I always do as you bid me," she smiled.

He nodded grimly. He did all the intricate, thankless business of her half-barbarous kingdom, spent himself in schemes and toils on her behalf. She would come to the Council chamber with her length of shimmering embroidery, so docile, so clever, with her wise little remarks, her shrewd comments, with so much majesty in her glance and gesture. But afterwards she would hasten to her sport and her pleasure, forget it all, fall into idleness or feverish activity as suited her mood, and leave all to him.

"For the matter of your marriage--"

"Marriage! How I weary at the word!"

"I know. It is true that there seems no one--"

"Do not talk to me of policies, sweet James! I have been biddable, I have no faults concealed."

"Ah, madame!" He looked at her sideways, resenting, admitting her costly rarity as she lay there dewy fresh and warm as a pearl in a summer sea. She was twenty-two years old, gentle and fiery, soft and reckless, full of wiles and little lies. Her features were straight, with a high forehead, a pouting upper lip, a rounded chin and a complexion of flawless purity. Her brows were faint arcs of gold dust, her eyes were marigold brown, but, in the iris, flecked with dusky purple, like a pansy where the petals spring from the heart.

She had been over four years a widow. Moray recalled with disgust and compassion the swarthy boy rotten with disease who had been her husband. She was twice a Queen; on the azure velvet of her

headboard the curved silver of the French lilies and the devices of the Valois showed between the harsh colours of Scotland.

"What did you think of Henry Stewart?" asked Moray directly.

"He is a tall, proper youth."

"I mean his temper and his ambitions."

"What do I know? We played at billiards and he won a crystal from me."

"If he were a man," said Moray, "rather than a silly boy, he might well be your choice."

"Because that would silence the Lennox claims?"

"Yes."

"Then none shall blame me if I make this match?"

Her firm lips, softly painted, parted in a smile.

"No!" cried Moray sternly. "I do not trust him nor his father, nor any of that faction. I would as soon that you took the English blockhead."

"Elizabeth Tudor's lover?"

"We do not know."

"We can guess. Dudley does not like me. I do not tempt him; he will not cross the border to look at me. Oh, Jesu! How long am I to be marketed? If Henry Stewart should woo me, may I not yield?"

She moved towards Moray, turning in the bed, and touching his hand

again. She was like a gilded flower. He felt dizzy from the heated air, from the perfumes of her body that he could see beneath the ermine, from the melting glances of her humble eyes. She drew a lazy breath.

"May no man have me?" she sighed, "Why should I be so set aside?"

"Madame, one sells common things easily, one barter long over a pearl, a star, a peerless gem."

"Too long, sweet James, and your pearl dissolves in tears, your star is hid in mist, your gem is flawed."

She looked at him so shrewdly that he remembered two dead men and wondered what truth had been twice stifled in blood. The handsome young Frenchman, how familiar she had been with him, leaning on his breast in the dance, plucking at the lute he held on his knees, toying with his curls, like an idle flirt, yet when she had found the wretch hidden in her privy chamber she had called on him, Moray, and in a womanly passion, bid him strike the intruder to the heart.

"Tell me of Henry Stewart," he said, to change his thoughts. "I must know. Is he a young, gay person, loud, expensive, giddy?"

"He can play tennis excellently, he is quick. He puts all his revenue on his back, he sings in a voice you'd not expect, so soft and strong, he likes hot wines and spiced foods. He talks English and puzzles over Scots, he knows no French and his fingers are clever with the lute."

"He is no husband for a Queen."

"Find me, then, another."

"Madame, you do not mean that you will accept this boy?"

"Did I say I would? Or only that he had a fair face? Or did I say that? It is true, he is fair, like Adonis in a painting."

"I shall see him, and judge him."

"And must I abide by your judgment?"

She sat upright in the bed, the pillows to her waist, behind her shoulders the celestial blue and moonlit silver of France; the man watching her felt as if nets were being spread for him by a deft young sorceress. He fixed his mind on the God of John Calvin and John Knox; he thought of the loathsome obscurity of death, of the brevity of earthly brightness, of the rough country that he longed to possess and thus he stilled his attraction to this gay, alluring woman of his own passionate blood, with the idle heart and empty arms.

The Lennox boy was as honourable, as convenient a match as any he could contrive for her, if the groom could be taught his place; yet the thought of her, bloomy and fragrant, in that same bed, in the hot youth's embrace made him quiver with nausea. He forced himself to say:

"If he was not an idle youth, if he could learn to be wise and quiet--"

The Queen laughed; with a languid movement of her arms she slipped out of the ermine, showing her smooth, curved shoulders, her full, firm bosom. In the hollow of her breasts was a ring of blood-coloured stones slung on a chain as fine as human hair. Moray wondered sullenly who had put it there. He had suspected her and John Gordon, but she had ridden northwards, beside him, Moray, to put down the Huntly and his brood. He had made her stand at the window in Inverness and see John Gordon die. He had not been able to guess her feelings, though he had watched her very carefully. She

had stood erect with her smile of fatal sweetness, a little curious frown between her faint brows. When the strong fine man had knelt before the block she had peered forward. The executioner had bungled, there had been a sickening scene of butchery. She had said nothing, but she had fallen down at Moray's feet, so suddenly that he had hardly time to catch at her brocade skirts. He recalled the sense of satisfaction, of release, with which he had held her in his arms, how her little white teeth had glistened between the dry lips and how the faint veins, like the fine traceries of a flower, had shown in her throat.

Afterwards she had been silent about the Gordons; even when the body of the old Cock o' the North had been set up in his coffin to be judged, she had made no protest. Did she blame her brother for his cruelty, did she know what had inspired it?

Then, with Pierre de Chastelard he had been quite sure of her wantonness and had fretted in dumb torment, but she herself had bidden him take the insolent youth and kill him instantly. Then he was ashamed of the delight he had felt at this proof of her outraged innocence. Now he sighed, much doubting her integrity.

"Harry Stewart is coming to Edinburgh," smiled the Queen with exquisite malice, "and you shall judge him."

Moray rose and took his leave with embarrassment. There was nothing more to be said and he wished he had not come.

As he turned to her, she leapt to her knees in the soft bed and threw her arms round his neck, kissing him slowly on his cold cheeks.

"Kind brother," she whispered in the voice of a lover, "sweet James! Who else have I? You shall guide me, you and you only."

Moray did not return her kisses, her caresses. He told himself that she was not only sullied, but depraved. Yet, when he had thrust her from him and she lay, rebuffed and drooping on the pillows, he believed in her guileless, simple honesty.

The Queen listened to the door closing on her half-brother. She laughed.

"Is he not a proper gentleman? If he had been my cousin instead of my brother, I would have solved everything by marrying him."

Mary Seaton spilled her beads into her lap and yawned.

"Madame, I think him black, dull, and tedious."

"Valiant, though, Mary. A bold, strong fellow. I like these men who must rule. Sometimes he hates me because he is misbegotten. He wants to be King, and yet he loves me, too."

"I think so, madame. I hope so, seeing what power he has."

"I like to play with him. A priest become a Puritan, is not that curious? A lost heretic, my poor James, damned for other secret sins as well, do you not think so?"

"How can I tell, madame?"

"I swear there is no ice in his veins. The King, his father, was no dullard. James is so strict and godly, so precise and sober, do you not think he gluts himself in secret?"

"Ah, well! I've heard no tales."

"He would be careful. A threadbare prudence, like his coat." She flung back the coverlet and sat on the edge of the mattress, her feet

on the bedstep. "How he will hate Harry Stewart." She took off her caul and the harsh, stiff, crimped hair hung loose to her waist. "Is there dancing to-night?"

"If you wish, madame?"

"No. But let them play some music in the next chamber, so that we can hear it. I ought to think, but I never can, when I try I dream of love and fall asleep. Did you see how I probed his mind and did not let him know my own?"

"He'll know it soon enough, madame, too soon for comfort--when Lord Darnley comes to Holyrood."

"To-morrow, Mary, to-morrow. Tell me what you thought of him."

"Again?"

"Yes, again, I want to talk about him!" The Queen rose and stood on the silk rug before the fire; the glow of the flames shone through the gauze shift, outlining her white body. "There was never another like him, never."

She put her restless hands on Mary Seaton's smooth, bright hair.

"I am as tall as my father they say, but he can lift me, easily."

"Did he try?"

"Into the saddle, yes. Come, you are so slow, if you were me, would you not take him?"

"Oh, madame, I wonder!" The girl lifted earnest eyes.

"Being a Queen, one would not want to please oneself only--"

"Why not? One will never please any other." Her exquisite face dimpled. "James would like an image of ice to sit at the board and sign his papers. Perhaps I have been too fashioned to his liking, too pliant, eh?"

"I only thought--" Mary Seaton rose, "if Lord Darnley was not worth--"

The Queen stopped her.

"Oh, his worth! Would you not like the man to embrace you? Would you not like to see him agonized with love?"

The two French girls held the gilt-lipped vases of milk and slowly poured them into the alabaster bath. The white fluid flowed round the breasts of the Queen as she sang to herself quietly. From her rounded mouth the melody rose like a trickle of silver.

She sang a poem by Pierre Ronsard, who admired her so much, who had praised her so extravagantly. It was about a lovely girl who had died young; on her grave were tossed a basket of roses and a vase of milk.

The Queen wished she had rose-petals to strew in her bath. In France one could get them, early and late in the year, grown under glass, but here it was so cold, the summer so short, the flowers so few. Even the milk was difficult to obtain; milch cows had to be kept specially and the Puritans were insolent even about a trifle like that.

The French girls poured in more milk; it rose to the Queen's chin; she stirred her limbs in the full bath. The room was very warm. Mary Seaton threw perfumes on the fire so that the air was thick and close. The Queen felt drowsy and rather sad. Already her life seemed to have been unfortunate. When she was a little child she had dwelt in a castle on a lake to be away from rebels and enemies. She thought

that she could remember it, grey, cold, with low clouds flying round the standard on the tower.

When she thought of France she sighed. She had had to work so hard at her lessons and behave so straightly under the eye of her stern grandmother, who always dressed in green serge and kept her coffin where she had to pass it on her way to chapel. But there had been something grand and splendid about her French life, and when she became older she had enjoyed much more freedom. She had liked her uncles, the soldier and the priest, they had understood her and taught her so much. She recalled how the Cardinal would lift up her hair and kiss the nape of her neck and sigh a little. It had been gorgeous to be Queen of France, a bright and vital position. When Mary Tudor died she had been Queen of England too; she had had much satisfaction in quartering the Leopards. How could Elizabeth, who was a bastard and a heretic, be Queen? But the English people had chosen her and it had been necessary to give way.

Not perhaps to give way for ever. Her uncles had told her to flatter Elizabeth and win her rights by guile, even to sanction the persecution of the Romanists for a while.

She stirred in the warm milk. The French girls, who wore white aprons and had their sleeves rolled to the elbows, were preparing another bath of clear water.

The Queen smiled, thinking how clever and docile she had been. She had allowed her half-brother and his friend, Maitland, to do everything, though she believed they had both been traitors once and might be again. On every disputed point she had given way. Mass was heard nowhere in Scotland save in her own Chapel of Holyrood, where even the Church had been desecrated and ruined. But some day, surely the Pope, or the King of Spain, or her little brother-in-law of France would help her to crush the heretics, not only in

Scotland but in England, where she was also rightful Sovereign.

She closed her eyes, the milk lapping at her ears. If she were married to a strong, valiant prince, one who would defy Moray, she might do this. She loved the thought of a master, one who would take her, body, soul, affairs, and rule. Was Henry Stewart such a one? He was the handsomest creature she had ever seen. She smiled secretly, thinking of his blushes, his shy air touched with sullenness. What did he know of love? He was so young, his haughty mother had kept him so close--perhaps he knew nothing. How Moray would hate him! He detested the idea of her having a lover.

She thought of her young husband with pity and abhorrence. That had been a travesty of marriage, a mockery of passion. How he had slavered and moaned for her kindness! Sometimes he burnt with fever, sometimes he was cold, soaked with sweat, always there were foul exhalations from his body, and he coughed and strangled, and sores came out on his joints.

He was the King and she had had to lie down beside him and hold him while he tried to sleep. Sometimes in the dark he would whisper, begging her to pray that he might die.

For the last months of his life he had been quite imbecile, staring, with his finger in his mouth, and shaking his head for the pain of his diseased ear.

The Queen's thoughts turned again to Henry Stewart. How different marriage would be with him! She felt brushed by light when she thought of him. With a carefree movement she rose and stepped out of the bath, the drops of milk like pearls on her nude body.

The French girls were chattering with Mary Seaton, giggling over love, clothes, and satanism. Mary Seaton was pious, but sometimes

she liked to hear of these things. How could one live in the Court and not know of these smooth seducements and tempting sorceries? These amorous tales that made all the prudes secretly malcontent?

The Queen entered the bath of pure, greenish water that became delicately clouded by the drops of milk from her body.

"He was seen setting spells in the tennis court," laughed Renée.

"Who?" asked the Queen. "And in the tennis court! So public a place?"

"It was at dusk, madame, and lonely, being the winter, you understand. Another saw his familiar--a great ape, as I live--"

"Who is this?" asked the Queen. She moved languidly in the bath, watching her white limbs, slightly distorted under the water; nearly everyone was accused of sorcery. Some said that John Knox was a wizard. Lord Ruthven knew about black arts; he had given her a protective amulet, half ashamed of his own beliefs.

The French girls would not reply; they laughed together, fingering the jars of cream, the pots of unguents, the combs and tweezers needed for the adornment of their mistress.

"You're fooling me," said the Queen pleasantly.

"Madame," said Mary Seaton, "they speak of Earl Bothwell."

The Queen was silenced, but her narrowed eyes shone with interest. The man had an infamous reputation, he was disgraced, outlawed for plots and brawls. He had broken prison and gone to France. People still talked of him with dread and fear.

Encouraged by the silence of their mistress the girls continued their

gossip.

"He has three wives and one is a witch. He can raise the wind."

"What makes you talk about him?" asked the Queen keenly.

"Idleness," said Mary Seaton. "They must chatter about ghosts and devils and demon lovers, so the talk turned on to Lord Bothwell."

"Is he a demon?" demanded the Queen.

"Oh, madame! But you know what is said of him!"

"Do I? Not all, I suppose. He was my mother's faithful servant, I cannot hate him."

She lay in her bath musing on this man whose image had been suddenly evoked. Moray loathed him, Moray had enclosed him in the Castle because of some lunatic talk on the part of Arran, who was imbecile. But she, the Queen, had contrived his escape. If Moray had known that, he would have said some terrible things. Being a woman and so hemmed in, she had to use guile and sometimes it was successful.

How the girls loved to talk about Bothwell and his vices, his black arts, his courage, his strength, his treacheries in love! How the men detested him, except his own kin, and men like Huntly, who were ruined and desperate!

The Queen splashed in the bath.

Bothwell was the superior of all of them. Until Henry Stewart came to Scotland there was not his peer in the country. He had been bred a Frenchman and was so elegant and accomplished, so gay and courteous, he made his fellow Scots appear like boors, filthy boors

some of them, the Red Douglas Morton, for instance--she could never think of him without nausea.

She listened, as she moved idly under the water, to the girls gossiping over Bothwell's mistresses, all the creatures whom he had ruined, trampling simplicity, trust and gaiety into the dirt, like a swine, for all his beauty. The Queen laughed in her throat. She knew that all these deserted women had offered themselves to the man with the infamous reputation, pleading to be taken.

She rose out of the bath and stood while the girls dried her with fine linen. She compared in her mind these three men, Moray, Bothwell, Darnley. There was something to admire in all of them. She glanced at the blood-red ring that hung between her breasts. She remembered how her half-brother had looked at it when he sat by her bed, and she laughed with a joyous sense of power.

The festival to welcome Lord Lennox and his son to Holyrood had been devised by the Queen herself. She was very adroit in elegant entertainments which she had learnt at the Louvre in Paris, at Chenonceaux, the chateau on the water, and Saint Germain-en-Laye. She liked something surprising, odd, fantastic. The Feast of the Bean that she had held the other day, that had been delightful. Mary Livingstone had found the Bean in her slice of the cake, and she had been chosen Queen of the Feast.

Her mistress had lent her a superb white and blue gown covered with silver paillettes that she had worn as Queen of France, and many of the Valois jewels that she had brought from Paris. That was a pretty, dainty fancy. It had been delicious to stand aside and see this mock queen receive homage. To-night there was to be some new-fangled fancies, a masque of Russians, a masque of monsters, and, perhaps, Mary Fleming as queen. She was going to marry William Maitland, who was much too old for her, and who was really a little in

love with the true Queen. She liked him, he was so fine, so adroit, so unscrupulous, so open-minded; he despised rough, coarse Calvinists like Lindsay or Ruthven, he even a little despised Moray.

The Queen was dressed. She wore a black velvet jacket with a pinched waist that was unbuttoned on a shirt of cut needlework, breeches with silver tags and laces, and black hose. Her crimped hair was tied with a gold ribbon in long tresses above one ear, and on the other side of the head the hair was gathered under a flat cap on which was a tiny circlet of pearls, a jest of a royal crown.

Her face was exquisitely painted, crimson on the pouting lips, gold dust on the shaven brows. This disguise of an insolent boy, a pert manikin, a court monkey, made her appear seductively, dangerously feminine.

It was Mary Livingstone, a little uneasy, who was dressed like a queen and forced to hold a mock court in the centre of the long gallery at Holyrood. This left the Queen quite free to follow her whim. She stood apart with Mary Seaton and the French girls. A great many people were there, even those who most disliked festivals, even those grim Lords of the Congregation whom she took to be no better than rebels. Clumsy and rough, they stood aside in groups, condemning, wondering, hostile, and rude. They were not bred for palaces nor even for cities. They were at home in their own castles, stern moated holds, or riding the heather with a bag of porridge and a plate slung on their saddles for their day's rations. Some of them could bring a thousand men into the field if there was a foray or a raid or a rebellion. The Queen was first amused at them, then annoyed at the poor show they made.

Henry Stewart came from England where he had been at the Court of Elizabeth; no doubt Windsor, Richmond, and Greenwich were far more splendid than Holyrood. The Queen did not want her estate

despised by Henry. Stewart; she wished she could have received him in the Louvre or at Fontainebleau. She was vexed that she was no longer Queen of France; she had fitted so exactly into that setting, like a cut and polished jewel into the circle of a ring. She was glad that Earl Bothwell had seen her in Paris in her sophisticated magnificence.

Moray saw her and frowned at her disguise; it was just these tricks that made the preachers thunder against her wantonness. He whispered to Maitland, who shrugged, amused. He thought that the Queen's coquetry was delicious.

"It is a charming symbol of royalty," he said, "as pretty as a carcanet or a sceptre, a chain or a globe."

Moray did not reply; the lightness of Maitland often jarred on him; the man always edged away from definite action, definite speeches.

The angered Lords, who felt humiliated by their own uncouthness, gathered round Moray, though he did not encourage them. They admired him for his intelligence, his clean living, his disdain of violence, his godliness. He kept himself aloof from them though he was aware of all they did. He smiled at Lindsay and Argyll who were his sisters' husbands, he spoke to Ruthven and Cassilis, he was friendly with Erskine and Atholl, men far more moderate and intelligent than the others, but he disclosed his mind to none.

Lennox and his son were late. This caused great dissatisfaction that swelled into angry talk under cover of the masque of the Muscovites.

This dance of men in skins, with white masks, shaking bells, and moving in and out of one another in mazy patterns seemed absurd and childish to the Scots Lords. Nor could they understand the French jests uttered by the dancers, at which the Queen's household

laughed so shrilly.

They discussed the recall of Lennox in whose honour this feast was given; comments, opinion, maledictions leaped in and out of dark conjecture and surmise.

Lennox was of royal descent, so was his wife, Margaret. He had played the traitor and fought with the English on the Borders, because his rival, the head of the Hamiltons, had been chosen Regent for the young Queen. For twenty years he had been banished, his estates confiscated, his sons had been bred as Englishmen--now he was suddenly recalled and restored to his honours. Why? Because he was a Roman Catholic? Because of some subtle policy on the part of tricky Elizabeth and her Cecil?

The Hamiltons were furious; not one of them was there. The chief of them, the Duke of Chatelherault, who had been the Regent, pretended to be sick. His son, Arran, had aspired to marry one of the Queens. He was now a lunatic and shut up.

What did Lennox hope to do? The Lords thought of him with fury; he would not find a friend, no, not one, except the Lennox Stewarts on his own lands at Glasgow.

There had been some talk of the elder Lennox boy marrying the Queen. Did anyone think that the Lords would endure that? Those who had seen him at Wemyss Castle said he looked like a girl; he was quite beardless and smooth and everything he said was silly and insolent. Could the Queen fancy such a one?

Under the shield of the Muscovites' bells and the scrape of the violins and the giddy laughter of the French at the indecent jokes of the masquers, Patrick, Lord Ruthven, muttered the name of Chastelard--was not he also lady-faced, a weedy nothing, fond of lute strumming

and sickly verses? How could one tell where the caprice of a woman would lead her?

So the Lords, with no regard for civility or good company muttered and complained, uneasy, hostile, while the masquers ran about the smooth floor of the gallery shaking their branches of bells, bouncing up and down in their furs.

Moray sought out the Queen where she sat in her fantastic disguise under the musicians' gallery. She looked pensive and he thought this a good moment to give her some honest advice.

"No one is pleased about the return of Lennox," he said.

"No one is pleased with anything that I do."

"Have you done this? Didn't the English Queen send him?"

"Why should she?" the Queen shrugged away. "Is it to her advantage that I should marry the heir to Scotland?"

"She knows the boy. She can, perhaps, guess at you--since you are both in her way. Maybe she would be pleased if you destroyed each other."

The Queen seemed startled; the smooth face under the page's cap frowned.

"How could we--destroy each other?"

Moray sighed. He was a gloomy figure in his rubbed velvet, his sole jewel the Order of the Thistle on his broad breast.

"Scotland," he said, "would not endure this marriage--there is not a man would hail Henry Stewart as King." He seated himself stiffly on

the stool beside her. How small, how ridiculous the tall woman, who could be so majestic, looked in the page's dress!

It seemed absurd that she was his Queen--his sister. He began to plead with her, warmly, awkwardly, dropping all titles of respect. His thick eyebrows twitched over his intense dark eyes, his sulky, sensual mouth was dry.

The Queen listened, lolling on her cushion.

"Do not do it, Mary. Lennox is a weak, rascally adventurer; to set him up will offend everyone. The boy is untamed, a downright fool, some say. A Papist, too. You know how badly that will go down. Do not marry him."

"Whom am I to marry, then?" She looked down the spacious gallery where the candles shone above the masquers and the grumbling Lords. Her voice was humble, her attitude meek. Moray stared at the crimped tresses tied under the jaunty cap.

"Wait. I will find you a husband. A man, one capable of ruling Scotland."

"You can do that for me, James--rule Scotland."

"But not for Henry Stewart."

She glanced sharply over her shoulder at him; she seemed pleased to see him moved; she laughed as if his urgent gaze excited her, as if his husky voice roused her curiosity. "Go on," she whispered.

"You mock me. I want to save you. Don't you see? You are in such a perilous place. Only I, helped by Maitland, could keep you there!" He began to plead. "Mary, couldn't you trust me? Believe in me and no one else?" He took her slack hand and began to caress it with his

large, smooth fingers. "Remain without a husband, Mary, play a long patient game, wait, till we find the man who suits us--"

She gazed at him tenderly; he held stubbornly to his impossible desire. Then he added:

"Leave it to me. If you will stay unmarried--I--I could forgive--I could excuse some womanish weakness. If you were discreet, I might endure your singers and chamber boys--"

"No, you are too jealous."

Her face, warm, pale, with the freshly painted mouth, was close to his; this proximity forced him to reveal himself.

"Mary! Cannot you remain as you are? The Queen. Without lovers or a husband? Enclosed in royalty? Scotland!" He bowed his head over her hand. "I swear to God," came his muffled voice, "that you should always be safe and happy."

She did not disturb him; many unspoken thoughts went to and fro like shuttles between them as they sat in the alcove. What he said tempted her facile mind. To be the Queen and nothing else! A decked, immaculate image high above the heads of men, regarded with reverence and awe, a symbol of royalty, of purity, of grandeur, every man in love with her, no one daring to approach her, she above the need of love, wedded to her regal state. While Moray, the royal born, who had missed the throne by a Church ceremony, stood for ever guarding her, keeping everyone at bay, exalting her, making her admired, prosperous, great. He saw her hesitation and for a second cherished a stupid hope.

"Could you do it, Mary?"

She played with him, half deluded by her own subterfuge. "Why not? I

trust you."

She meant that, though she knew that he had taken money from England and once intrigued with Elizabeth against her sovereignty. But she was sure that as long as she was near him, smiling at him, deferring to him, he would serve her well, as no other could or would.

"Well, then, let this silly youth go."

She sat so meekly that he ventured further.

"I can only do it if you listen to me, obey me, follow my advice. I cannot protect you if there are scandals."

The Queen drew a lazy breath; his hopes increased. He reminded himself that she had stood beside him to see John Gordon mangled, that she had called him in to slay Chastelard. Perhaps, after all, she did secretly prefer him to any other man. He saw himself master of Scotland, and the Queen, disdaining all pretenders, hated, perhaps, but high-set and proudly enclosed in the people's esteem.

He began to kiss her fingers, which he had kept in his until their two palms were moist.

The noisy masque came to an end. The mummers trooped off, chattering in French.

The violins began to fill the silence with a delicate concord. The Queen's mood changed, like water running out from shade into open places changes in colour. She rose, taking her hand swiftly from Moray's lips.

"What a poor, ragged company," she smiled. "Everywhere the work of country tailors and the manners of boors. We need Earl Bothwell here--I thought of recalling him, if it is only for the grace he gives to a

festival."

Moray was deeply angered by this sudden insult as he took it to be. All his hopes sank, leaving bitterness behind. "When Earl Bothwell returns to Scotland, I leave it, madame."

"Oh James, you are too sullen and precise. What has the man done? No worse than any other."

Furious at the introduction of this detested name, Moray replied sternly:

"I hope you do not know what he has done. His name stinks. Don't speak of him. There are some things not to be named for honour's sake."

"How odd that he escaped from the Castle," smiled the Queen, ignoring this rebuke. "He twisted the iron bars apart with his hands and slid down the face of the rock with a rope--"

"A tale to amuse children," sneered Moray. "Some foul bribery got him out."

"But he is very strong. He can dance in full armour. So skilful, too; whenever he rides at the ring he takes the prize."

Moray moved away; he had no more words for her to mock. How could she, when he had opened his heart to her, wound him by the mention of the abominable man whom he, with every justification, loathed? Again, and painfully, he doubted her integrity, and her innocence. How much did she know of James Hepburn, this damned Earl Bothwell, enmeshed in the infernal arts? Moray made a movement as if washing his hands and turned away. Accursed swine of a sorcerer!

Lord Lennox and his son, with a retinue of Stewarts, arrived as the masque of monsters was beginning. They were exactly at the time that the Queen had named and Lennox was troubled to find that the festival was so well advanced. This gave him an air of negligence and he was very anxious to please. He hoped that the Queen would remember the time that she had set. He paused inside the low door, biting his forefinger, with his son beside him.

The entrance was quite filled up by his followers; he was very careful how he went about Edinburgh, where he had no friends, where he had not set foot for twenty years. He was a tall, nobly shaped man, but stooped as if he bore a burden on his back and his face was yellow, puffy, and swollen about the eyes.

The monsters paraded down the gallery; they were acting on orders from the Queen in taking no heed of the newcomers. She had purposely arranged that Lennox should come late when the hall was full so that she might observe the effect of Henry Stewart's entry on the Lords.

She crept along the arras and watched the isolated group, of whom no one took any notice. Inside the door, Lennox, peering between the monsters with their ogre heads, shaggy coats and lashing tails, espied the dais with the lions and the figure there round whom the ladies crowded.

Uncertainly, but with the air of a man who forces himself to hold his own, he made his way towards the mock queen.

This was an anxious moment for him. His return to Scotland had been quite a speculation; already he wished that he had remained in England, even though there had been a Proclamation by four heralds at the Market Cross restoring him to all his honours and estates. All the Lords were so hostile and jealous, so keen to do him a mischief,

so resentful of past injuries. The Hamiltons were so much against him, and Arran, by a lucky chance, was shut up as a lunatic, but there were so many of them. He really doubted if he could hold his own. There was Moray, too, who seemed all-powerful with the Queen; he was sure to be envious and bitter. Lennox thought of all the money he had spent; seven hundred pounds he had brought with him from England and it had nearly all been squandered in furnishings, clothes, entertainments, presents. He had had to give the four Maries jewels, watches, fans. How casually the greedy little hussies had accepted these gifts and, no doubt, forgotten them already! Perhaps all this expenditure was wasted. There was just the hope that his son, Harry, might take the fancy of the Queen. Would he? Lennox was doubtful. The boy was young and knew no arts. The English Queen, who had a critical eye for masculine charm, had passed him over as "yonder long lad." Lennox felt hot, sick and baffled as he pulled at the starched cambric at his neck, conscious of the ribald masquers who seemed to mock him with venomous satisfaction as they pranced up and down. Then there were the cold frowns of the Lords, gathered together, conversing, he was sure, in abusive whispers.

His son plucked at his sleeve, breathing in his ear.

"This is not the Queen but Mary Livingstone dressed up as a joke."

"What shall we do?"

"I shall find her."

Everyone was staring at Henry Stewart, Lord Darnley, as he, blushing, angry and clumsy, made his way through the crowd looking for the Queen.

Moray, adroitly behind Argyll, surveyed the Lennox boy with a bitter curiosity and what he saw made him feel old, defeated and foolish.

Beside the princely grandeur of Lord Darnley the artificial splendours of the festival seemed dusty, withered, and insipid. He was not full grown, but already as tall as the tallest of the gaunt Lords, as tall as Moray himself. He had a deep chest and wide shoulders, he carried himself with an unthinking, rather crude arrogance, like a young bull. He stood firmly, keeping his feet far apart and often sticking his clenched fists into his waist. His face was in truth like that of Adonis, round features with a warm golden bloom and full lips. His eyes were clear hazel with the lustre of perfect health. He would be fleshy; already there was a hint of that. He had the sullen, slightly suspicious air of one stupid and easily baffled; he had the insolent swagger of one forcing his character, but with all these defects, his physical magnificence was not easily discounted.

His attire was too splendid and looked gaudy amid the ill-clad, uncouth Lords. It also destroyed the balance of the superb shape of his body. A padded doublet of white velvet covered with gold tracery, for which the tailor had not yet been paid, made his torso appear enormous; a ruff of bone lace starched and wired shortened the appearance of his neck and kept his head stiffly fixed; his huge, shapeless sleeves, stuffed, gashed and laced, made his smooth hands appear quite small. His legs, tightly clad in yellow silk, seemed too slim to support all this pomp. His thick, honey-coloured hair was brushed up on the top of his elegant head and tucked behind his right ear, from which hung a pearl.

The Lords nudged, sneered, and cursed. The youth seemed to them an abomination, worse than the French whom the Queen had brought home with her, more offensive than Earl Bothwell, with his infamous reputation. Yet the gaze that Lord Darnley turned on them as he avoided their grouped hostility was candid, defiant, almost pathetic, like that of an outwitted child.

Moray did not sneer nor misjudge, did not condemn nor scorn. He

saw quite clearly the attraction of the boy and he felt a physical sickness, a prickling on his skin, a rasping in the throat, a trembling in his hands, that were, he knew, the symptoms of a jealousy that could not be controlled. He felt a desire to escape as if he were imprisoned in a drain, a yearning to find an outlet to the light, the air. With no excuse to anyone he left the overheated gallery.

Lord Darnley found his cousin where she had been waiting for him in an alcove.

Timidly, with eyes full of humility, the Queen looked up at her cousin. The young man stood over her with an air of shame; he looked amazed at her fantastic, insolent costume. He complained of his reception, that she mocked him, that all the Lords were hostile, he harped on her kindness at Wemyss, he asked why she played with him. She had to listen very attentively to catch what he said, for she was not at all familiar with English.

That did not matter; his words were of no importance; she reassured him by her timid smile as she examined his fair face with the frowning brows, the clear eyes, the angry curved mouth, the lustrous ringlets of close hair. She said in a low, cajoling voice:

"I, too, have to suffer from the arrogance of these people. Do you think it is easy? You can see for yourself. My brother, too, Moray, he rules everything. Watch how they spy on us now, while we talk. I am only a woman, I was not bred to this country."

She coaxed him for his promises of help, of protection, for his compassion. She seemed to search, gently, skilfully, after something elusive, potent. She begged him to release her from them all, from the pinched-faced Calvinists, from the dark Moray, from the slippery Lethington. The youth, who could not follow all she said, for she helped her English with French, gazed at her earnestly, held by the

inescapable radiance of her eyes. He had never even imagined anything like her before. She quite amazed him in her page's dress, with her little cap and long tresses, with her fluent speech and gay, quick gestures, with her short jacket and tight hose. It was as if she wove a net round him. He frowned, wondering what she wanted him to do. Would she marry him? Ought he to ask her? He wanted to get away and think. To consult his father, since his mother, who was so much wiser--and so much more indulgent--was not there.

The Queen stopped speaking and began to laugh. All this magnificence standing there dumb, afraid of her! She felt flattered--what would he like? What would make him speak? If she gave him Scotland? What would he do with it?

As she stood there, the young man began to stammer and plead. What could he do? What did she want? Could he dance with her while she wore that whimsical dress?

"You were not so shy at Wemyss," she said softly.

Behind them were discordant voices. Many of the Lords were clattering away, rudely interrupting the dancers, jostling the French. She noticed that Moray had gone. Lennox was moving about uneasily, making loud, ineffectual conversation with acquaintances; he seemed stupefied, even browbeaten. Every time a page offered him wine he drank. Lord Ruthven followed him about, blinking at him with bloodshot, rapacious eyes, sticking thumbs in his belt and asking news of England, demanding the name of the boy's tailor and if those were the latest Parisian fashions.

Lord Darnley observed this from where he stood; he turned to stare, being unable to move his head because of the ruff and high collar. The Queen watched indolently the boy's slow rage as he saw his father being baited. He was like a young mastiff straining at a chain.

It would be splendid to let such a devoted, ferocious creature loose on one's enemies.

She detested Ruthven, who always looked at her with direct scorn. He was a lout, a boor, not fit to come into her presence, and there were many like him.

She touched the young man's padded sleeve; how huge and virile he looked! If she married him, Ruthven, Lindsay and all the bilious Calvinists would have to cringe before him. That would be a malicious revenge on them for all their disloyalty, their harsh talk, their sour gossip. Ah, for a master, for them and for herself!

Her fingers crept from his sleeve to his hand; he turned sharply, his jewelled, scented bulk between her and the gallery.

"Yes?" he breathed eagerly.

"Dear," she smiled indolently, "dear."

She thought drowsily of Moray, jealous, resentful, reverencing her, wanting to set her up, to keep her immaculate as his Queen. She thought of the men whom Moray, with her consent, even, as it had seemed, by her command had sent to the scaffold.

She looked up at her cousin and comforted herself with this fresh devotion, this clean youth, this untainted strength. Perhaps he was stupid! Well, she had had enough of clever men, intriguing for themselves. She put her hand on her cousin's firm, slightly-pouting lips and he kissed timidly her palm where Moray had kissed it a little while before. His sulky fairness reminded her of John Gordon whose blood she had watched, quite as if it was a thing of no consequence, ooze and spread over the planks of the scaffold.

Ah, this lover Moray should not take away and destroy! It would be

sweet, triumphal and glorious to have power, to be free of Moray, to rule, to love, to have the priests back, to banish the heretics and to defy the English.

Moray walked through the misty streets. He had slipped the Jewel of the Thistle inside his coat and so looked, in the obscurity, like an ordinary citizen. He thought that this was far safer than going about with a crowd of armed, liveried followers to challenge riots and provoke brawls. Besides, he believed that there was no one with sufficient grudge against him to wish to attack him in the dark. He was popular with the godly, who overlooked his deep avarice, his grasping hold on confiscated Church lands, the other estates that he had acquired by dubious means.

As he left the Abbey behind he felt cleansed, relieved, and confident of his half-sister. He did not believe that she would so carelessly forget what he had said to her as to marry Henry Stewart, though she might flirt with him. Moray tried to forget the youth's sulky, golden beauty, his large, unspoiled strength.

The chill of the winter night had purified the filthy smells of the city, which was ill-lit, ill-kept. Moray carried a small lantern which showed him the dirt beneath his feet, the pools filmed with ice, the garbage and rotten refuse.

Though he was fastidious he preferred this dirty street to the splendours of the Abbey. He had a strong feeling for the people--there was nothing in his veins but ancient Scotch blood. He was acutely conscious of the country, of its remoteness, poverty, violence and struggle to exist. He wanted to help Scotland. But it was difficult; everyone with whom he had to deal was greedy, treacherous or tainted by Papistry.

Yet he did not feel despondent. His task seemed to him high and

noble, worthy of a man's highest efforts. He no longer was pricked by fear of the Lennox boy, of Earl Bothwell, of the Queen's caprices. All these seemed manageable, something that he could hold in his hand.

He raised his lantern to look at a deserted house that he passed. It had a bad reputation; the shadow of the triple Hecate brooded over it and it was shuttered bleakly against the night. A jolly, plump woman with a ringing laugh had lived there. She had been a witch, an abortionist, a seller of aphrodisiacs, of poisons, a trader in all that has no lawful price, no earthly market. She had lived under Bothwell's patronage, posing as his kinswoman.

Moray shivered as he gazed fascinated at that barred, disused door and thought of what had happened in that house--infernal rites, abominable bargains and inhuman sacrifices. Maimed goats and swine had been found in the sties of the backyards and little foul-smelling graves in the garden.

The woman had been discovered through a wretched affair that had reflected on the Queen. Two of her French servants were secret lovers. By the help of the fat woman with the cosy laugh they had murdered their little child, had been discovered and hanged, pelted with dirt by the Puritans, preached against by John Knox. The witch had fled. When her door was burst open, the house, reeking of drugs and worse, was empty. No doubt Earl Bothwell knew where the woman was hidden.

Moray was glad of his own well-ordered home and the woman sleeping there, Agnes Keith, to whom he had lately been married. She had not troubled him for the love he had not got to give her, but she had roused in him a safe, pitying affection. He was grateful for her dignity, her effacement and her careful conduct of his establishment.

Moray threaded nimbly past the taverns where the yellow light spurted, past the beggars bowed before the menace of the night, until he came to the high walls of his own garden.

As he turned the key in the lock he felt easy, confident, sure even of the woman in the palace--she would never betray him, no, not with a lewd sorcerer, not with a stupid boy, not with any scoundrel at all.

Lennox and his son sat up late in the lodgings for which they had not paid, among the handsome furniture that glossed their poverty. The elder man urged the younger, standing over him, now goading, now pleading, sometimes almost whining, then threatening.

"Get the Queen, get the Queen--any way, by any means! Doesn't she fancy you? Isn't that enough? You are only a blundering simpleton, you ought to be five years older. Compromise her, entangle her, don't you want to be King of Scotland?"

The tall, heavy youth sat sullenly over the fire and let these reproaches batter at his ears. He felt hostile, offended, even shocked. He had never been intimate with his father, who had only lately taken any notice of him. He wished that his mother was there. She had always done everything for him, led him by flattery, advised him with soothing words, made him feel manly and free, even while she had told him exactly what to do, even to the way he wore his cap or fastened his collar, while his father, bullying, pleading, made him feel insignificant, dull, a mere cat's-paw to snatch the family fortunes out of the fire.

Neither did the young man like the way his father spoke of the Queen. Close association with his austere and stately mother had given him an unconscious respect for women. Maternal pride, hoarding his youth, his beauty, his manliness had kept him from

wildness and debauchery; his emotions took long to rouse, his mind worked slowly. He was more interested in sport, in dogs, horses, and games, than in women.

His feelings for the Queen baffled him; he wanted to keep them secret, to brood over them. He had been a little shocked to see her in the page's dress; he did not like to hear his father talk of her without respect, as if she was easy, light, almost shameless. He did not want a wife and he felt a definite shrinking from such a wife as his cousin might be--a creature whom he could neither understand nor manage.

He stared, with his round, childlike eyes into the fire, his hands on his knees, and endured his father's advice, reprimands, and urgings.

Lennox became at length exasperated by this mute resentment. He thought the boy impudent, and longed to strike him or to shake him. This was the result of a woman's upbringing--a lout who knew nothing, who blushed when a coquette spoke to him, who saw a crown dangling in front of him and gaped at it without moving.

"Have you nothing to say?" he asked.

"I do not know if--I like her."

Lennox became confused with rage; he stuck his thumbs into his belt and sighed. The youth continued, frowning with the effort of his speech:

"She seems so much older than I--and to marry a queen, that is always to take second place--"

"Not if she makes you King, you fool."

"Would she?"

He moved uneasily, thinking of how she had put her hand to his mouth and said: "Dear--Dear--"

He tried to think it out. What was the matter? No doubt his father was quite right, this was a brilliant chance, the most wonderful princess in the world. But he did not really want her. He had thought of girls in a vague, tender, brooding fashion--but she, the Queen, was not part of those dreams.

She troubled and vexed him and he did not really want to see her again. That pert, shameless costume dress! He did not think a gentlewoman would dress like that. He did not want a wife who looked like a mummer. As for all these intrigues, these schemes, this winding in and out of one's friends, and enemies, he simply could not think of it without a headache. If only his father would stop talking! He felt drowsy and with difficulty suppressed a yawn. Was not life quite enjoyable even if one did not marry the Queen?

Lennox, watching him, saw he was half-asleep and had a violent impulse to box his ears. But he controlled himself and talked about other things. He realized, even in his rage, that he must gain his son's confidence, flatter him, lead him on gently, even treat him with respect. After all, he played for a big prize.

After the festival at Holyrood that had welcomed Lennox to court, the Queen retired into her own apartments and was seldom seen.

When she did appear she wore her widow's mourning and her manner was remote and melancholy.

Moray triumphed quietly, the Hamiltons began to hold up their heads, and the Lennox faction to become very uneasy. On Henry Stewart, however, this withdrawal acted like an enticement; he became

covetous of those favours that she had seemed to promise, but had not, after all, given.

He was remorseful because he had considered her to be fickle, and dangerous. He knelt behind her in the chapel at Holyrood and his thoughts were all chivalrous, pure, even noble. He wanted to serve her, to protect her. He was ashamed that he could not love her, but he was eager to try to do so if she would give him another chance. He disliked and mistrusted the men who surrounded her, so much rougher and more menacing than those he had been bred among in England. Only Moray and Maitland seemed to him like noblemen, like gentlemen. He despised the others and let his contempt show in his fair, candid face. He detested the Puritans too. The English Protestants had scarcely interfered with him, but these extreme Calvinists, the bold, reckless-tongued followers of John Knox who meddled with everything that was pleasant and amusing, these black-visaged Scots, he hated.

He felt sorry for the Queen, forced to live among such detestable people, and, kneeling at his red velvet prie-dieu, he looked at her anxiously, and with compassion.

The Queen felt free in the chapel where no Protestant ever entered, where she was alone with her household and her friends, where she heard no alien Scots tongue, but only the Latin and the French with which she was familiar.

She knelt erect, slim, and stately in her heavy black robe. Her bright hair was gathered under a little cap, her beads of ebony, her crucifix of ivory hung at her waist. She kept her hands lightly joined together. She was conscious of the splendid young man behind her, gazing at her with a reluctant adoration. The place, walled against the light, with carvings and windows of coloured glass, soothed her sensuous nature. The smoke from the pure wax candles mingled with the

incense from the thurible.

The priest sang, the choir chanted, at the altar frontal the altar ornaments shimmered like sunshine on a water-break.

The Queen's mood became exalted, she felt an impulse of piety towards this God whose worship was so luxurious, so pleasant. Yes, she believed this was the one ancient and true Faith. How delicious to think of Heaven, as gorgeous as Fontainebleau, awaiting after one was satiated with the delights of the earth. She felt comforted to think of those strong angels and pitying saints watching over her; if she was guilty of some little sin they would see that she was forgiven. As long as she was true to them they would be true to her, save her, absolve and protect her. When she came at last to die they would lift her soul out of her body and carry it to lovely peace and cool magnificence.

The singing ceased gently. The priests moved to and fro. The Queen rose, her black skirts spread out far either side of her tiny waist. As the priests passed, she bent her head humbly. When the priests and the choir had left the chapel she looked, unsmiling, over her shoulder at Henry Stewart, standing stiffly before his prie-dieu.

He thought she was very smooth and meek and appealed for pity. He flushed slowly, feeling himself manly, strong, potent to save her fragile weakness.

Florestan, the Queen's favourite monkey, had escaped. With his quick, dry brown hands he had broken his chain and run out of the Queen's chambers.

He had soon been missed and was seen in various places, perched on a door, swinging on a fold of tapestry, running over the poles of a window curtain.

The Queen became quite agitated; it was terrible to think of the frail little animal, lured by curiosity, wandering away from safety and comfort out into the cold, and perishing in the stinging wind and rain. So many of her pretty little monkeys had died since she came to Scotland, though she took such care with them.

She lifted her long black skirts from her feet and ran here and there, down the corridors of the palace, as the alarm was given that here, there, the truant had been seen.

A man whose face she knew quite well, but to whom she had never spoken. stopped in front of her and spoke very respectfully, bowing low.

The monkey was in the chapel. If Her Majesty wished, he would get it for her, without a scandal.

The Queen, curious, asked:

"A scandal?"

He explained himself. He spoke French very well, but she knew him to be an Italian, for she had already been to the trouble of discovering something about him, and she listened, leaning against the gilded wall. She liked his manner of speaking, and the mind behind the speech.

Well, about the monkey; if the evil-minded Puritans got to know of it being in the chapel, they would say ugly things. It was better not to give such stupid fools a chance. If Her Grace understood him? These fanatics! They saw the devil everywhere. Even he, alone in the chapel by the light of one candle, had been quite startled when he had looked up suddenly and seen the monkey running about.

He had gone there to fetch some music. Her Grace would not recall him, but he sang bass in the choir and had done so since Christmas.

The Queen said:

"I understand. Come with me and help me to catch Florestan. It will be a good thing if no one sees us. I remember you, yes, you came with the Duke of Savoy's envoy last autumn. You and your brother."

She nodded to him to follow her to the chapel. The young man obeyed, nervous at being alone with the Queen, at whom he had so often looked over his book as he sang, but whom he had never thought to speak with. He was silent, wondering what he could do with this brilliant opportunity. His usual cleverness seemed of no use to him here. The Queen, careless and easy with everyone, hastened ahead to the chapel. She paused in the doorway. She had never seen this sanctified place save when there was a service. Now it seemed quite quenched and cold, with the one candle, burning to a blackened wick, stuck in a holder near the choir stalls.

The light of this was sufficient to reveal Florestan crouched on the altar, gripping his thin legs with taut hands, while his shadow, huge and wavering, was flung on the sacred picture behind, like that of some aerial devil, hovering to corrupt the atmosphere.

The Queen was startled. She drew back and touched the young man behind her and he lost his head, because he, poor wretch, had felt the Queen's gown brush him, her veil touch him. He could have put his arms round her shoulders, but he stood rigid, his large dark eyes shifting and furtive. He was used to the great world, but only as a servant.

The Queen stared at him over the edge of her stiff ruff.

"Catch Florestan for me. This is horrible, to see him on the altar." As he passed her, trying to master his self-consciousness, she asked: "Are you Giuseppe Rizzio?"

"No, madame, my name is David. Giuseppe is my younger brother."

She had known this, but wanted to force him to explain himself. She had often noticed him in the choir; he had extraordinary eyes, so dark and dense that the iris could not be distinguished from the pupil, and arched, lively brows. His face was thin, pale amber in colour, and healthy. He was quite elegant; there was something swift and eager about him, too. A pity that he was so shabby.

She watched him, moving cautiously among the shadows, endeavouring to surprise Florestan. He had lit some more of the candles and the cross lights wavered, reaching tall and tremulous on the gilded fan tracery of the ceiling. They seemed far away from everyone else; it was not likely they would be looked for here.

The young Italian moved cautiously, retreated, advanced, while Florestan watched him with melancholy eyes of imbecile mockery. The youth's slim body in the black clothes, his long dark hair which hung over his shoulders, his soundless tread, made him appear part of the shadows, a phantasmagoria, like a puppet-show against this strange background--man, monkey, in some malicious dance.

As the monkey leaped suddenly on to the pyx the Queen crossed herself with a thrill of superstitious horror--it seemed, for a second, as if the devil were indeed loose in a holy place.

The Italian sprang at the altar and grasped the animal. One of the candles went over with a clatter. Terribly excited, the little grey beast bit and scratched into the man's thin-clad arms, but without a murmur he carried him to the Queen in the doorway.

"I will take him to your apartments, madame--he is too angry for you to touch him. Afterwards I shall return and put out the candles."

He shook Florestan free of his arm, but gently, and grasped him by the collar.

"You are hurt!" She saw the torn sleeve, the quick welling blood, and she smiled with pleasure at his bravery. She admired courage above all virtues. She leaned towards him. "Come, I will see that your arm is dressed."

"I feel nothing," he answered, and it was true. He felt nothing of the wound because of his joy at having attracted the attention of the Queen. He was feasted, gluttoned by the miraculous moment.

The two Italian boys lay snug in the cramped chamber in the servants' quarters that had been allotted to them when they joined the royal choir. They were shut away from all the grandeur of the palace like mice in wainscoting. Out of their hole they peered and pried, ran in and back, learning, noticing, for they were quick, neat, and patient, familiar with every scandal and rumour.

David, who was the elder by three years, lay along the trestle-bed and proudly showed his bandaged arm.

Mary Seaton had tended him, while the Queen looked on. In his deep, husky voice he related her gracious kindness, the dazzling richness of her apartments, her sweet, sharp beauty, which was far more marvellous when seen close than when viewed across the smoke-hazed chapel. He was quite bemused with his good luck and chattered foolishly as if his fortunes were already made.

Giuseppe listened shrewdly. They had always been so poor and led a hard, adventurous life, kicked from this filthy drudgery to that,

learning sly tricks and how to fawn and cringe. A gift of music had raised them from the scraps and the broken pots. They had come to Scotland in M. de Moreta's train and then found employment in the royal chapel because they were Romanists and there were not so many of these from which to choose voices.

The little, dark room was cold. Giuseppe huddled under the patched coverlet of his bed; he hated these northern winters. He was not as sanguine as his brother; no one had taken any notice of him except to scold, cuff, or abuse. Lean, dark, and with huge eyes full of disillusion and prejudice, he listened to the boastings of the elder, who by the light of the coarse candle showed the arm bandaged in the Queen's apartment.

"What did you ask of her?" he demanded.

"Nothing. That was the cleverness. It would have been a great mistake to have taken a reward. Now she will remember me, try to do something for me."

He fell silent, his chin in his hand, his long hair sweeping over his face. The sudden thought that this chance might come to nothing made him feel quite sick. It was such a little service! Why should she remember it? What prospect was there that he would ever again come to the threshold of her gorgeous chamber, ever again stand close to her as he had stood in the door of the chapel? He cast round for a possible patron to advance him, the poor, despised foreigner, someone in whose train he might slink again into the Queen's presence, someone who would give him an opportunity to remind her by an eloquent glance--no, not of his paltry service, but of the humble adoration that he felt for so divine a mistress.

"It is very cold," grumbled Giuseppe. "I am going to sleep."

He huddled down in his clothes in the trestle-bed, pulling the thin coverlet over him. The brothers were little better lodged than they had been when they had first come to Holyrood and M. de Moreta had dismissed them, from economy. They had then slept on an old chest in the porter's lodge.

David shivered too. He began to pray with servile intensity, as was his nightly custom, to a little image of wood set up in the corner which he had brought from Piedmont and which he took to be his patron saint—that his base fortunes might change. Then, like an answer to his petition, a name slipped into his arid mind.

Lennox—whose son might marry the Queen—why not try to take service with him? Was there with him a refuge from his present misery? The Queen! Maybe she was not so far from him after all.

The Queen went to Leith, riding on a white horse. She was plainly dressed and the soft wind blew in her face. She was restless and had insisted on going out, although the weather was drab and chill. The men and woman following her whispered among themselves that she had not spoken to Lennox for two days and that Lord Darnley had not recently been to the palace. They all glanced with added respect at Moray, who rode beside the Queen. There was a strong man who would endure no interference in his schemes. How could the worn-out, discredited Lennox and that sullen young fool of his, hope to displace a man like Moray?

Under his assured, austere manner, Moray felt his triumph keenly. He enjoyed the mild indifference of his half-sister's glance, her soft, affectionate words, her manner of appealing to him in everything, of deferring to his judgment, his wisdom, his experience.

Well, he had subdued her pert rebellion against his authority. She had had the sense to see how flimsy her own ideas were compared

to his grand, statesmanlike designs.

A thin mist blotted out the horizon: the breeze stirred the sea into sullen wavelets and there was a dull sense of depression in the air. The sea birds, swooping over the slowly heaving water, were livid in their clear brightness.

The Queen sighed and spoke regretfully of the chill season of the year. How pleasant it was on Leith Sands when they were able to ride at the ring or shoot at the butts! Would the spring never come?

Moray looked at her with satisfaction. She seemed hardy, simple, almost austere in her simple gown and hood, with her pale, serious face. He was proud of her and felt master of her destiny and his own. But when she spoke next it was to say something that entirely shattered his elegant self-assurance.

"I saw Murray of Tullibardine this morning. He came from Earl Bothwell." The Queen spoke ingenuously, stroking the neck of her white horse.

"And I did not know about it?"

"Indeed, how was that? But it hardly matters."

"It was a great insolence for Earl Bothwell to send anyone to see you." Moray could say no more for rage. "He begged to be allowed to return to Edinburgh," said the Queen.

"Where is he?"

"On the Border somewhere--in hiding. Perhaps at Borthwick."

"What did you say to him?"

"Oh, I was angry. I said: 'How could such a villain ask such a favour?' I said: 'Why did he not stay in France where he was Captain of the Scotch Guard?'"

"You should not have answered him at all, you should have sent him to me."

Moray was deeply angered. The Queen turned her shoulder with a shrug as if she cast off indifferently his ill-humour. Out at sea a faint line of light broke through the mist; the Queen pulled at her bridle and turned her horse towards Edinburgh.

In a lowered voice meant for her ears only, Moray reviled Bothwell—a man who had been driven out of Scotland. One who should be, by birth, an upstanding man, but who was instead a filthy rogue, a lying villain, rotten to the very soul.

"You speak so earnestly," said the Queen, "I might think that you were afraid of him."

"I am afraid of seeing Scotland trampled on by that domineering young man."

"How serious you make it!" laughed the Queen; "I like to have him like a bird on a string to let fly or to pull in and cage as I will."

"A cruel and a dangerous game."

Moray thought the case was serious. Despite her ingenuous ways and indifferent, half-weary smile he suspected her of a hundred duplicities; so close to his uneasy affection for her was an unquenchable doubt of her integrity. But he endeavoured to make an effort over his great and, he thought, most justifiable anger, and to speak to her lightly, as an adult to a child, as a wise man to a foolish woman, treating the whole business as a caprice, but he warned her

that it was a caprice which must not be carried any further. She must not hold any communication with Bothwell nor with any of his friends, not even with Murray of Tullibardine, who was a respectable and well-meaning man. "There are not many such," added Moray with a sneer, "that one could count among Bothwell's acquaintances."

The Queen did not reply to this warning. She rode carelessly beside her half-brother, and whether or not she listened, he could not be sure. Before them the purple hills round the city rose into a pellucid sky from which the mists were blowing away; a plentiful light was overtaking the last of the day. Moray, perceiving this transfiguration, felt his spirits rise, his strength increase. After all, he could circumvent the Queen and Bothwell and the Lennox Stewarts.

He continued, though in a more good-humoured tone, his rebukes and his warnings;

"Madame, you must consider your position. With the coming of Lord Lennox the Hamiltons are deeply offended. Though they are poor there are many of them. The little favours that you have shown Lord Lennox and his son, though I know they are nothing but courtesies, have set many against you. You promised me to have little to do with Papists."

She twisted his reproaches on to him, saying over her shoulder:

"Lord Bothwell is a heretic like yourself."

"Bothwell is beneath my contempt," answered Moray. "Let him keep away from Edinburgh, let him remember that he is outlawed, let him take care how he makes a league with Huntly, who abetted his father's treason."

"You fear them?" urged the Queen again,

Moray shook his head.

"It is base to fear creatures like that, but I must be careful they do not disturb our tranquillity."

Disregarding everything serious in what he had said, the Queen, slipping her reins in and out of her doeskin gauntlets, said lightly:

"Earl Bothwell may not come to Edinburgh, then? It is a pity--he has excellent manner and graces any company."

"Madame," said Moray directly, "if Lord Bothwell comes into Scotland I go out of it."

Moray meant this; he believed that without him and Lethington the country would go to pieces beyond her management to put together again. He wished he could make her understand that it was he and he alone who kept her in her place, gave her leisure in which to play her silly tricks, her elegant games. Only he, always by her side advising and guiding, represented a strong, stable government upon which men looked with some confidence.

The Queen spoke in a challenging tone.

"I'll not have Bothwell outlawed! Let him be! He served me honourably and I cannot hate him."

This roused such disdain in Moray that he was ready to accuse her of almost any wickedness. He scorned to remind her again what Bothwell's character, reputation, and offences were, and rode beside her in a haughty silence. He could not conceive how any woman could forget the crime for which Earl Bothwell had been cast into Edinburgh Castle. This had been nothing less than a scheme to abduct the Queen, murder Moray and those who stood nearest the

Queen in relationship or confidence. It was true that this plot was not as simple as it appeared. Bothwell was a subtle man, he had involved the wild Arran in his infernal schemes, thinking to work the Hamilton's ruin by using him as a cat's-paw.

But Arran, frightened, had run squealing to Moray and divulged Bothwell's evil plans.

Moray glanced sideways at his sister as she rode a pace away from him and recalled that day when they had been hunting at Falkland and Arran had come there gibbering with his half-incoherent tales of Bothwell's treacheries. She had not been alarmed. When Bothwell had come, fast on the heels of the informer, to clear himself, she had listened to him, sat patiently while he had stood before her, justifying himself forcibly in a long speech, blaming Arran as an imbecile, blaming everyone who spoke against him; naming them as liars and traitors. If she had not been there Moray would have seen to it that Bothwell had died as Huntly had died--a sudden falling from his horse as he mounted it, a stab in a scuffle or a brawl. Ah, were he the King with full powers, Bothwell should have troubled no one any further! Instead, the Queen had listened and smiled and shrugged, said she did not believe Arran, she only half-believed Bothwell, and what did it matter, some wild tavern talk!

She put aside this hideous entanglement of murder, rape and treachery without investigation, as if it had been a trifling disagreement between gentlemen in her antechamber. Bothwell had been placed in Edinburgh Castle, certainly, but Moray could not forget nor forgive his quick and easy escape. It was too bitterly clear that the Queen had not been offended. She could not, indeed, as she had just declared, hate Bothwell.

Why should she remember. Moray asked himself, those slight services which Bothwell had rendered to her mother? Some

generalship in Border skirmishes a mission to France to ask for help. Others had done as much and been forgotten.

He told himself, as they rode in the park beneath the bare trees, that he must move sharply and cautiously, keep a wary eye on his half-sister. It was foolish of him to be lulled by her air of simplicity; it was dull-witted of him to indulge in those moments of confidence, when he held her above censure and believed that she was simple and innocent.

He looked at her again with hostile eyes; she seemed to be drooping in the saddle though she had not been long on horseback and he had known her to ride easily for hours. There was weariness, too, on her brow, and her lips, from which the paint had faded in the open air, were pale. She was inscrutable. Moray warned himself that he had better not vaunt his fortunes while he had this woman to deal with. Sometimes it really was as if she bewitched him with her affected airs, her seductive smiles and timid appeals for advice and guidance. Perhaps all the time she was deceiving him. At this he felt such a jealousy that the whole world suddenly seemed to him disgusting and filthy. He had noticed before that when he had a thought that smirched his sister's image in his mind the very air became tainted and a slight physical nausea tormented him.

As they rode through the park with the last sudden light behind them she said easily:

"You must do what you will about Earl Bothwell, I am tired of the city. I believe that I shall go to Stirling."

The graceful young Italian cringed before Lennox, who regarded him with some suspicion. Since he had come to Edinburgh and had been restored to his estates he had interviewed many people who wished to be his servants or to join his retinue. But he could afford

few of these: his rents and lands had been nominally restored to him, but he had yet to set them in order and gather together his various incomes. Besides, the future looked dubious. His son, whom he named "sullen booby" in his mind, was difficult, and the Queen, most elusive and provoking of women, had withdrawn into a silence which might mean aversion.

The Italian had called twice at the house in the Nether-bow before he had been admitted into the Earl's presence. On this third occasion he had only obtained an audience by chance. But he made the most of the opportunity, and his quick, fluent speech, which had only a flavour of foreign accent, fascinated the Earl, who stared at him, wondering if here was good, cheap, serviceable material.

He was attracted by this fellow who was so different from himself, who was rather like a greyhound, lean and swift, who had such intelligent eyes. His talents were such, it seemed, as would grace a princely household: he could play the lute, the virginals, and several other instruments; he would be able to accompany the young prince, Henry Stewart, when he wished to sing or play. He had a quick eye and a deft hand at arranging a cloak, a doublet, a collar, or a jewel; he could keep accounts accurately, he could speak French, Latin, English, and a little Spanish, he could write a fair Roman hand, endorse a deed, draw up a contract. It was astonishing what small, useful arts the youth had learnt in his short, hard life, but strange, too, that he had never come to be employed honourably before. That, no doubt, was owing to his low birth and obscure up-bringing. He had found it difficult to obtain a chance, yet, after all, he had not done so badly for himself, having contrived somehow to hang on to the train of the Duke of Savoy's Ambassador, and then to work his way into the royal chapel of Holyrood.

The Earl asked him why he wished to leave this decent livelihood within the Queen's palace.

The Italian replied that he was scarcely paid at all, that between the Matins and the Masses and the practices he had little time to call his own, and who, he added, could compare the honour of being a singer in Holy-rood Chapel with that of being in the employ of so great and gracious a prince as the Earl of Lennox?

Lennox hesitated. He did not know if he could afford the man; he was aware how expensive and luxurious these foreign servants were. Besides, he did not altogether trust him, the fellow seemed too clever. He thought that he preferred Englishmen like those wild young Roman Catholics who were already in his son's service, who joined him in all his sports and games, the two Antony Standens. Then the Italian, who had been keenly watching the other's puffy face, saw his chance vanishing and began to exaggerate, even to lie. He whispered that he had some secret influence in the palace, that the Queen favoured him, that she had employed him sometimes to write her letters because he was so good a scholar and wrote so clear a hand, had trusted him, even, with some secrets about money lent from the Pope. Oh yes, he had been more than a servant, a spy. He knew several cyphers, was within the confidence of all the great Papists, he had often sat in the Queen's closet quite late at night inditing some of her secret correspondence, and afterwards he had played the lute to her, for she was much given to melancholy, after she had been tiring herself with political business.

Lennox listened attentively; the affairs sounded plausible. The Italian stressed his point: it was because of his ardour for the Roman Catholic religion that he offered his services to Lennox. He insinuated, though he did not put it into so many words, that he would be a convenient go-between to and from the palace and the Lennox lodgings; he wished very much to attach himself to the service of the young prince. Was it not to his advantage and that of all Roman Catholics from the Holy Father downwards to see Henry Stewart--He

paused, and then added boldly: Was not the Queen to wed Henry Stewart?

Lennox liked the sound of that. Dull and slow but nonetheless ambitious, he had always moved in a slightly baffled fashion through the intrigues of courts. He understood that one must plot and scheme, if one were to keep a foothold among so many rogues, villains, and time-servers. He did not know quite how to do this and in Scotland he was treated almost like an alien, therefore this subtle, cringing, clever tool would surely be useful. He had no spies in Holyrood, having neither the influence nor the money to arrange this. Perhaps he had been a fool to spend the seven hundred pounds he had brought from England so openly, giving it in presents to giggling women and gaping pages instead of using it to employ a crafty, lying instrument like this Italian.

He looked at Rizzio critically. The fellow made quite a striking figure in his chestnut-coloured attire with the silver stripes, his long, thick black hair falling either side his thin, masculine face.

"You may wait on my son if you will. Perhaps he can find a use for you in his household."

Unobservant and self-engrossed in his own vanities and troubles, Lennox did not notice the radiance which passed over the young Italian's face. He fell on one knee and kissed the Earl's podgy hands, then, anxious not to tarry now he had obtained his advantage, he departed, after begging permission to return on the following morning.

He turned into the street full of relief and triumph; he had staked a good deal on this chance with Lennox. He had been quite penniless when it had occurred to him to present himself before the Earl, and as no one either liked or trusted him he knew not where to turn to

borrow a few pence. Yet it had been impossible to present himself before any prospective master in the shabby black which was the only garment he possessed, which he was always thankful to hide behind the livery that was provided for him when he sang in the chapel. In the bandage that Mary Seaton had put round his arm had been a gold pin with a white topaz head. He had not wanted to part with that, there were so many uses to which he could have put it. He could have kept it, to gaze at and gloat over: he could have returned it to the Queen and so made the excuse for another interview; he could, with some luck, have perhaps worn it in her presence and attracted her attention to it and evoked in her mind memories of the service he had rendered her once.

But he had not thought that any of these chances were as sure as that of employment in the Lennox household. So he had reluctantly, for he valued highly the gift of the Queen, gone to a jeweller and pawned it for sufficient money to buy the chestnut-brown suit with silver lines, a pair of hose and shoes and a black cap with a silver chain.

But he had not been able to afford a cloak, and as he strode down the windy street he shivered, hunching his shoulders together to keep himself warm and rubbing his hands on his cheeks, which were fallow from the cold.

Lord Darnley condescended to accept the services of the young Italian, whom he did not understand in the least, but took to be a very humble, modest fellow, eager to be of any service. Henry Stewart, was, in the estimation of all members of the true Faith, heir-presumptive to the thrones of Scotland and England. Self-absorbed and simple, he suspected no double-dealing on the part of the newcomer, whom he thoroughly despised as a foreigner of low birth, but found extremely useful for his submissiveness, his talents, and his flattery.

Lord Darnley, like his father, knew nothing of the court except what he had been able to observe from the outside.

David Rizzio knew a great deal. From the little room where he and Giuseppe had peered and spied out like mice, he had watched and listened. But he was careful to emphasize his lies as to the confidence the Queen had shown him. Quickly he sized up the character of the man whom he had decided to serve: he was careful to do nothing to provoke the doubts, suspicions, or jealousies of this unsophisticated youth, whose ideas were all narrow, conventional, and honest. David Rizzio was careful never to do anything to shock or disturb the young prince, whose intellect and whose principles he despised.

But he could not compete with the Antony Standens, the Englishmen already installed in his master's favour by the ways of games and sports, chess, billiards, fencing, hunting, riding at the ring, shooting at the butts, for in these things the Italian had not had any education. Nor could he handle a tennis racquet, nor lead a lady through a dance. But he had many other accomplishments which he had brought to a fine pitch of perfection and which were extremely useful to Henry Stewart—his elegant letter writing, his quick translation of foreign languages, his adroit touch with clothes, his knowledge of where and what to buy in Edinburgh, his cleverness in engaging servants and keeping an eye on them, his quickness at casting up accounts and spending money well, making a good display for a little expenditure. Henry Stewart was grateful for all these gifts put at his disposal.

The Italian had, also, a real gift for music, and music was Henry Stewart's one talent. There they met as equals; when they played and sang together the young prince forgot his unconscious contempt of the foreigner, and the Italian forgot his conscious contempt of his

master. They respected, and even liked each other on these occasions, some queer affinity rose between them, the bass and tenor voice blended well together, they kept exquisite time on their musical instruments--the lute, the zithers, and the virginals. Quite seriously, forgetting their common disdain, their mutual scorns and differences, the tall blond prince and the lean swarthy servant would sit together in genuine amity playing over some new piece from Italy which relaxed Henry Stewart's mind, so troubled by his father's feverish ambitions and stirred David Rizzio's fancy into a whirling fantasy of all the possibilities of his high promotion.

Lord Moray was satisfied. Bothwell's emissary, Murray of Tullibardine, had withdrawn from Edinburgh with a sharp rebuke. Bothwell had been ordered to leave the Border or to appear in Edinburgh and answer to the charges against him. Moray smiled, feeling sure that no one, even of Bothwell's insolent boldness, would dare to accept this challenge. But he gathered round him in the capital and the palace armed companies of his own followers.

The Queen was complaisant; she let Murray of Tullibardine go as she had let him come, with no comment. She did nothing to rouse Moray's suspicion; she was courteous to Lennox and his son, but no more. She seemed to listen willingly to Thomas Randolph, Elizabeth's Ambassador, who continued to press the suit of the Earl of Leicester, "that impossible marriage".

The Queen played with the idea, saying that after all if the Earl was a proper man and he had pleased Elizabeth Tudor, he might please her. Also, she would do anything for peace and future union between the two countries, and if Elizabeth should choose her as her heir, she might also find her a husband.

Moray took this as mockery and watched his sister carefully. Why would she go to Stirling? She did not trouble to explain herself. She

said he could guess her reasons, and when he asked her if it was the stench and crowd of the city, the tolling of the death-bell for those dead of the pox or the plague, the tumult of the executions by torchlight, she shrugged and was silent.

He questioned his sister, Lady Argyll, who seemed as much in the Queen's confidence as any woman. The anxious lady, though a loyal Protestant, could give him no news to ease his mind. The Queen disclosed herself to none; even in her privacy she was light, careless, smiling, sunk in a gentle melancholy, a soft brooding.

Did she love Darnley? Moray queried anxiously.

Lady Argyll did not know. The Queen had praised him, but she was ready to praise any proper man--and Lord Darnley was handsome enough to make any woman stare.

Moray brushed that aside impatiently. That his difficult policies should be hampered by these feminine caprices!

"Will she marry a man for his fair face and wide shoulders?" he asked bitterly.

Lady Argyll did not know. She replied with a smile:

"Women have wedded for slighter and worse reasons."

If the Queen did not love Darnley, did she love anybody? Moray's anxiety showed in his frown, in the drooping lines of his mouth. He viewed with deep apprehension the journey to Stirling. Lennox and his son were going there, too. Did she want to escape from him, Moray, and his diligent eye, from his stern glance and tongue? Did she wish to continue her love-making in that remote fastness? He would not believe in such hypocrisy.

He consulted Sir William Maitland who, patient and amused, watched everything. He thought the Queen was deceiving her brother and laughing at him; at the same time he did not think she intended marrying the Lennox boy. He kept his own counsel on this matter and reassured Moray.

"Let her go to Stirling. What good will you achieve by tormenting her, restraining her liberty and her pleasures? The country is your business, you've enough to do there."

"Ay, enough," assented Moray grimly. "But with the Queen's Majesty lies all. I must watch how she behaves, which way she turns, whom she likes" He stopped suddenly. "That young Italian, now! Why is he suddenly in the Lennox service?"

Maitland replied lightly:

"He is a clever rogue who knows how to twist and turn to his own advantage."

Moray frowned.

"He has become intimate with Lord Darnley. They are always together; he is more with him now than those English gentlemen he brought from London. He takes him with him to the palace, to the presence of the Queen. I have had him watched. He spends money, too. I have learnt that when he came here he had not a cloak to his name and slept on a bare chest in the porter's lodge."

"What's in this to do with us?" asked Maitland. "This is a cunning rogue who will make his way, and Lennox and his son are easily gulled, no doubt, by flattery."

"I do not like such men," said Moray, "to be close to the ear of princes. I think it's dangerous to see a villain close to a fool. This is a

Papist, a greedy mountebank with no spark of honour. In a few weeks he begins to behave almost as if he were a gentleman."

"He is not in your service nor in mine," replied Maitland, "why should you think him dangerous? Let him cheat those who pamper him."

"But Darnley takes him to the presence of the Queen," fretted Moray. "It is like a bloated spider--"

Maitland's brows went up, and he compressed his lips. Here, he thought, comes the core of a matter which must never be glanced upon. Perhaps I also have my jealousies, but I control them with more dexterity.

He laid his shapely hand on Moray's dark shoulder, and in a tone of comfort he said:

"Let the wretch be. If he becomes insolent, he'll not last very long."

At Stirling the Queen felt indeed comfortable. She felt soothed and protected by the heavy walls of the huge, remote castle. Here she was free of all the miseries, the agitations of Holyrood and the capital, here there were no spies to peer and glance, no foreign envoys to flatter and fence with, no Thomas Randolph to force on her another Queen's discarded lover, no Moray to frown, rebuke, and warn. There were no Calvinist Puritans to insult her, naming her Holy Church "harlot" to her face. She was free of the stinking streets, the clanging bells of the desecrated churches, the brawls and quarrels that echoed in her very palace, the lewd crimes and the bloody punishments.

A faint, almost imperceptible spring tide was breaking even on this northern land. In France the first blossoms would be out and she would be sending her maids to gather violets to lay between the folds

of her clothes...

They set up the magnificent bed she took with her from palace to palace. It had been given her by her mother, Mary of Guise, and was of violet-brown satin lined with crimson, heavily garnished with gold and silver. She cherished it, not only because of its superb splendour but because of her mother, whom she had loved most tenderly. Her heart would tighten when she thought of that heroic woman, the one creature who had loyally and devotedly served her interests, protected her rights, to the very end fought and schemed and struggled for her that she might preserve the Crown, which had come to her when her father died of a broken heart soon after her birth.

"Oh, mother, mother!" said the young Queen, as she sat down on the bedstep and rested her head on the splendid coverlet.

She remembered her mother's visit to France, how gay and joyful they had all been, she and her playmates, Claude, Elizabeth, Marguerite, the little boys, Henri and Francois. How light and easy all had seemed then! It was only a few years ago that everything had changed. She remembered the sunny rivers, the bright, open fields, the gay palaces of France, and she felt exiled from her heart's desire. Yet to live here was to be a queen and that was much. Yes, that was better than a paltry lodging or the chatter of amusing company...She checked her thoughts. She had not come to Stirling to brood, but to be free. She deluded herself with that word, the hallucination of the restless, the ambitious and the proud. Free! She was lonely in a solitude. She was riven by nostalgia, by yearnings, by she knew not what desires.

"Oh, mother, mother!" She rested her smooth cheeks again on the coverlet. She was tired from the long ride, she wished she had not come. The place was gloomy, hostile, surely.

She called Mary Seaton who was always near, always anxious to serve and to obey.

"Undress me, put me to bed!"

"Madame, it is scarcely dark."

"What is expected of me?" asked the Queen wearily. She began to pull off her ruff, to unknot her bodice; her gloves lay already on the floor at her feet.

"Madame, Lord Darnley wishes to speak with you. He stopped me just now and seemed in a kind of passion, which I think is uncommon in him. He has few words, I know."

"Why should he find words to-night?" asked the

Queen, without pausing in taking off her heavy riding-habit.

"I cannot tell. I suppose he thinks he has waited so long--those weeks in Edinburgh. At first you were so kind to him, afterwards, I suppose, he was disappointed. He gave me a letter."

"A letter!" The Queen snatched lightly at the folded paper that Mary Seaton held out. "How long since I have had a love-letter, Mary, or one that I have read?" The pale girl was silent, shaking her head; she did not seem to like the subject. She turned aside to attend to the fire; though it had been lit some time ago, smoke still lingered in the chamber and the logs did not burn steadily.

The Queen opened and read the letter with curiosity. It satisfied her very particular tastes; it might have been written by a pupil of Ronsard. It contained those gilded and voluptuous compliments to which she had been used at the Court of France. It was exquisitely written on a piece of rubbed parchment tied with yellow and scarlet

silk, it wooed her with delicate, amorous reproaches, it revealed passion and tenderness and loyalty.

She folded it up thoughtfully. So, the golden youth could write like that. If he knew French, that language so dear to her, why had he not spoken it before and made his wooing quicker?

Mary Seaton came to her side and stood, frowning anxiously, peering down at the closely written paper. "Has he any merits? I thought him much moved."

"That might be his pride," murmured the Queen, folding up the letter. "I have humbled him with this waiting."

"I think if you could love him, madame--"

"Oh, love him!" said the Queen impatiently. "How we twist and turn that word, Mary! I would not dislike him nor neglect him, and yet, should I think of who I am? How much do you think he cares for me, Mary?"

She unfastened the heavy riding-skirt and let it fall to her feet.

"You remember the young Italian who used to sing in the chapel, madame?"

"David Rizzio? Yes. I have seen him often enough lately."

"Well, he has spoken to me," said Mary Seaton earnestly, "and more than once."

"Take care of him, Mary, he may be in someone's pay."

"No, I do not think so."

"But why," mused the Queen, "did he leave my service, where he had a chance of promotion, to go into that of Lord Lennox?"

"I do not know, madame. It is rumoured that he had a reason, but he will not tell it to me. I think he loves Lord Darnley. He serves him very faithfully."

"These common people are like hounds," smiled the Queen, "they'll lick shoes and take a beating. Well, what of your Rizzio?"

"He seems to me very humble and courteous, madame, and I take him to be a man of some breeding whom misfortune brought to servitude."

"Never mind his breeding," said the Queen, moving in her petticoat to the glow of the fire, "what did the fellow say, how did he interest you, Mary, what does it mean to me?"

She sank into the large chair on the hearth and leant forward into the pleasant circle of warmth, hugging her smooth, white arms with her cold finger-tips.

Mary Seaton related what David Rizzio had told her of his new master. It all went to prove the passion, the infatuation of Lord Darnley for the Queen. Of course, he had not been so stupid and vulgar as to talk openly before the Italian, but by a thousand signs, broken words, glances, sighs, staring at portraits, scribbling of notes, impatient ejaculations and sleepless tossings at night, Rizzio had understood Lord Darnley's case.

Darnley, who hitherto had been quite untouched by any feeling for any woman, was snatched up in such a high devotion to the Queen that he dare not breathe a word of it for fear of appearing ambitious, or coarse. It was only, at last, in despair at her long withdrawal from

his company and encouraged by the solitude of Stirling, that he had ventured to write the letter.

The Queen felt a great sense of release and relief. If this was to be the solution after all! If he loved her like that, might he not sweep all her enemies before him and make her his queen, as she had dared to dream when she had first met him? Well, there was now no need for her to hold him at arm's-length; she might encourage him, she might see what would happen if she allowed him a certain licence. There was no need to be cautious and ashamed with this man as she might have had to be cautious and ashamed with others, afraid of spies, of secrets coming to light, of little whispers and rumours creeping out.

She rose and shook her head so that the thick chestnut hair, slipped from the pins to her waist.

"He is a prince," she reminded herself, although she spoke to Mary Seaton. "He has the right--the right!"

The Queen dined privately in Stirling that night. Despite her fatigue she had not gone to bed, after all. She had put aside her mourning, the black, disfiguring clothes in which she had ridden to Stirling, and wore a little dress of green silk, which had been made for her when she was Dauphine of France. It was cut low and square on the bosom and had a high stiffened collar hung with huge pearls shaped like flower-bells that tinkled whenever she moved her head.

She had asked Lord Darnley to come to this little supper; she was attended only by Mary Seaton and Mary Fleming. It was the first favour she had shown him for a long time, and she looked at him kindly as if there was some secret, subtle understanding between them. She had his letter in her breast, over the blood-red ring she always wore. She touched it with light mockery, wondering if he

would understand the gesture.

He had little to say, but when he looked at her steadily across the table, she felt a thrill of delicious terror, such as she had not known for a long while.

In his simple clothes, his natural grace was very apparent. He seemed to put aside most of his awkward clumsiness with his court finery.

As she drank to him out of the gold goblet she always carried with her for her own use, she leant towards him, and the huge pearls tinkled on her stiffened ruff. She gave him, across the candles and the crystal and the silver gilt, an unspoken message.

When the board was cleared and the cloth was removed, everyone was for music, being too tired for billiards or chess. A tall crystal jug with a silver lip, filled with white wine, remained on the table, and as this was emptied the French servants filled it again. Mary drank slowly, deliberately, willing herself to be bemused, slightly intoxicated, so that all appeared to her radiant and beautiful, so that she could forget Edinburgh and Holyrood and all that was distasteful in the city, and only believe in this elegance that was around her, the two kind, faithful women and the handsome young man who looked at her with his candid eyes inflamed with passion.

She watched the blue and green jewels, sapphire and emerald, rise and fall on his broad chest. He said in a muffled, husky voice that, after all, he could neither play nor sing, but he begged that David Rizzio might come in to entertain the company.

The Queen, drinking carefully, nodded. She sat in the window-place, where the closet was so small that the fire had warmed every part of it.

Rizzio was summoned. He came at once, neither too servile nor too forward. He did not wear, as he had worn a few weeks ago, the Lennox liveries, but a plain, dark habit that did not clash with nor yet shame his master's magnificence. His smooth dark hair, long and heavy, was curled at the ends on his shoulders. He carried a gleaming lute inlaid with an intricate pattern, presenting himself humbly towards his master, paying him, cunningly, more deference than he showed to the Queen, to whom he bowed, but remotely, as if she was a grandeur beyond his sphere.

The two young girls sat on the cushions before the fire, and played with the rings on their fingers and the jewels at their neck. Each thought of her own affairs.

Mary Fleming mused on the widower. Sir William Maitland, she was so soon to marry and of whom she knew so very little. She admired him as a clever, masterful man, subtle and successful, but she wondered what life would be like with one who knew so much, who had been married before, and must find her, whatever pains she might take, foolish and ignorant.

Mary Seaton thought of her lover in the grave. She had vowed herself to chastity, her intention being to enter a convent, but she had met a man whom she wished to marry and he had gone to Rome to obtain a dispensation from the Pope. On the way back, crossing France, he had caught the plague and died. Mary Seaton was now twice pledged to virginity, once because of the Church, once because of this dead lover. She felt sad but serene, and at peace--the will of God was so manifest.

When her mistress married, and she hoped that would be soon, she would retire into a convent, away from all the horrid sights and cruelties and rage and lusts of the world which agitated her so much.

To these four people David Rizzio played and sang, choosing impersonal music and verses in a foreign tongue.

The Queen sipped her wine, the young man stared from her to the singer tensely, with a questioning look. The Queen did nothing to encourage or repel him. She did not wish to meddle with destiny, she wished to be borne on despite her own volition to some pre-ordained fortune.

David Rizzio sang and played, serving their moods, bringing them to the point where they wished to be, effacing his own personality, effacing even his own thoughts, lest the sense of them might disturb the harmony. Neutral, therefore, with a blank mind, he played. Once the Queen's drowsy eyes turned in his direction and she saw in the plain white collar at his throat a little gold pin with a white topaz head, and the slightest smile touched her mouth.

He had never traded on that little service he had done her when he had captured Florestan, the monkey, in the chapel. She admired him for keeping the pin, instead of ostentatiously bringing himself to her notice by returning it to her.

She looked at his sensitive profile bent over the gleaming instrument. A servant, basely-born, but there was nothing petty, nor ignoble in his appearance. She remembered lazily what Mary Seaton had said: "Well-bred and fallen in his estate." What did it matter? She sighed away even a hint of a thought of this; she was glad now that she had left Edinburgh for this retreat. Here she had really escaped much that was so unprofitable and troublesome to her. How had she endured this so long? Only perhaps because Moray, that powerful man, had flattered her by loving her against his wish. Yes, she knew that--the power she had over him and his resentment of it. And Maitland, too, who was going to marry the girl brooding by the fire, he also loved her, the Queen. But to torment these two had been, after all, merely a

silly diversion. How could she have endured this so long?

Well, she was free of it now. In the warm atmosphere, with the music in her ears, the wine on her lips and in her throat, the young man staring at her, worshipping her, she felt lifted immeasurably high above the black, broken, incomprehensible world that she had been called upon to rule.

David Rizzio, who had appeared to have seen and heard nothing, who had played like an automaton, suppressing his personality, followed his master out of the Queen's closet. The winds had blown out the lamps in the corridor, there were few servants in the castle, and they stood in semi-darkness with only the light from the moon coming fitfully from a high-set window.

The young man leaned against the wall and the servant paused behind him, holding the lute.

"Sir, where do you sleep to-night?" asked the Italian. As his master did not reply, he added in a low, insinuating voice: "She had your letter in her bosom, I saw a corner of it. She meant you to see it. Why do you not take your chance, sir, as every man must, or be left behind?"

With a contemptuous fury, Lord Darnley told his servant to be silent for "a chattering spy, a wretch of infamous thoughts."

The young Italian, not in the least affected by this abuse, spoke again, this time whispering, urgent, advising. Darnley, who was slightly drunk, leaned down towards his servant, then, when the Italian came to a pause, his master struck him over the face, carelessly, as if he knocked an importunate dog out of the way. But David Rizzio scarcely winced; he took his master's arm and guided him along the corridor and up a staircase, down a secret passage, through all the

places that he had noted carefully himself on his first arrival at Stirling, guided him exactly where he wished him to go.

The Queen sat alone in her bedchamber, erect in the great bed that had belonged to Mary of Guise.

She had sent away Mary Seaton and Mary Fleming and the French girls. Since she had been a widow she had always slept alone. When they had left her she had got out of bed and drawn the heavy curtains away from the window so that she could see the setting moon and the scudding clouds. An elusive, slanting light fell on the figure of the woman sitting up in bed, peaceful and expectant.

She was inspired by the wine, the music of David Rizzio, the glances of Henry Darnley, by her own dreams, visions, and desires.

Why had she not thought of this before--to escape from all of them, get away into a world of her own creating! If they would only leave her alone she had power to make everything beautiful and acceptable. Yes, if they would not interfere with her she could manage everything.

She felt so free and happy away from the shackles of the court, the glance of Moray's watchful eyes between the swollen lids, away from Maitland's fine spying and subtle traps.

She understood them so well, those two. They wanted her with a concealed passion, a possessive emotion that had neither heat nor light. But she was not for them.

The heavy door creaked, then opened. She lay still, waiting.

From out of the shadows the figure of a man moved, slow, hesitant, as if he followed some invisible guide. The door closed behind him and the Queen wondered that there was enough wind to move the heavy wood. The night was very still. The intruder, who seemed so

timid and reluctant, as if he had really mistaken his way, was tall and heavy. The Queen knew him at once. He came to the bedstep, raised the curtain and looked at her in the veiled moonlight.

She wondered what he could see of her; she must be a mere glimmer. He did not speak, but merely stood gazing. She recalled all that he had said in his letter...he was, then, lunatic with love, like a man ought to be.

She spoke to him in French, a murmured string of endearments. He did not answer. She felt melted by tenderness, by affection, by a feeling that was surely spiritual. She gave a sigh of deep content as she saw the future in a rushing vision, herself wedded to masculine strength and resolution, facing her enemies, driving them here, there, before her just contempt. This prospect of revenge for every past slight and humiliation was sweet to her; it made her feel humble and grateful towards the man who would enable her to indulge her vindictiveness.

He went on his knees on the bedstep and clutched the thick curtains so that the rings slid on the rods. Over his shoulder she could see the receding gleam of the fire. He began to ask her pardon, speaking English and in the tone of one who had no hope of mercy. It sounded as if he kept back tears.

She listened, amused and touched. How young and simple he was! She could not understand all his rapid, jerky words. She put out her hands and slipped her fingers under his hot cheeks, pressed on the coverlet. Yes, they were wet with tears. How was it that he had had the courage to come? Fondling his hair she asked him that, drawing herself along the sheets so that she whispered in his ear.

His voice came muffled, abashed.

"It was to ask you if you played with me. I don't know what to believe--I feel so lonely. The lies and the tricks--"

"I too, detest them! Forget them!"

"I feel so stupid. I understand so little of it. If you would tell me--Is this truth at last?"

He raised his head, peering. It was as if he offered her his soul. He was ready to do what she told him; he implored her not to baffle him, not to deceive his stupidity. She passed by his offer, she took no heed of his appeal, her violent fantasy for him made his virtue, his distress charming but foolish.

She told him to rise, to sit on the bed. He obeyed, stiffly, like an automaton. He began to stammer; she put her fingers over his mouth. She felt an indomitable will to live, to rule, to triumph, and as if the power to do this lay safely in her own small body, as if she needed neither help nor compassion, but only to unite herself to this pure, masculine strength, this profound devotion.

"You and I together ought to be invincible," she whispered.

He did not understand what she meant; her unseen beauties, only to be glimpsed in the tantalizing web of light and shade, filled him with a sense of life-giving power. Her choice of him exalted him in his own estimation. He too felt free, of doubts, mistrusts, suspicions, weaknesses.

Neither knew that the deceits of night, the false fires of passions and tainting appetites overwhelmed them. He entered the great bed and took her to his heart like a god leaning from a cloud to snatch an earthly, but a dazzling flower.

Moray felt as reassured and satisfied as if he were Regent, or

almost King of Scotland. His spies had had nothing disturbing to report to him from Stirling. The spring weather had suddenly become overcast and gloomy and the Queen kept mostly to her chamber, complaining of her old trouble, pain in her side. Moray felt firmly in his place, no one would ever dare call themselves his master. The only man who had the capacity to do so, William Maitland, was very willingly his lieutenant.

His possessive affection for the Queen was stilled. If she would not have Darnley and the affair with Leicester hung in abeyance, what had he to fear? Negotiations with foreign princes might continue endlessly. Meanwhile he could build up a strong, free, proud kingdom.

Scotland was miserably poor in money, goods, natural resources. But she was rich in the material that Moray most loved to handle--strong, resolute, hardy men, robust, pious women, people who could work, adventure, and suffer. The conversion of Scotland to the Reformed Faith seemed to Lord Moray nothing less than a miracle. He regarded with reverence the rugged peoples of this rocky, remote country who had so earnestly embraced the truth and cast behind them error. He believed, with all the strength of a stubborn nature, in the principles of the Reformation. He thought that darkness and deceit had been driven out with the ousting of Pope, monk, and friar, with all the false pomp and pageantry with which Rome marked pernicious doctrines.

Here Moray, who in so much was double and crafty, was sincere. He believed in John Calvin, in John Knox, and in what they taught. It was true that his convictions marched with his advantages, but he would have become a Protestant even if this had meant poverty and lack of power; dearly as he loved money and authority he would not have purchased them by remaining a Roman Catholic.

He thought of the time when he had been a priest as a period of miserable torment and misguided sin. He rejoiced in the ruined temples of Papistry, the broken walls of the convents, in the blackened foundations of the monasteries that defaced the land from west to east, from north to south. He had stood over the Queen while she, with tears in her eyes, with lips that she could scarcely keep steady even by biting them, had signed the Act which drove forth monks and priests as idolaters and adulterers from the land. He had, with contemptuous chivalry, protected her in the celebration of her own Mass, the only Mass heard now in Scotland. He had allowed her her chapel and her singing boys and her priests and her vestments, but only out of compassion for her weakness and childishness as one might allow a child its toys to keep it from crying.

Perhaps the time might come and even be not far distant when he would not permit the Mass even in Holyrood. He might choose to marry the Queen to a Protestant. There had been moments, he thought, when she had wavered in allegiance to the Faith in which the proud House of Guise had brought her up so strictly.

He had forced on her his ideals of government, his friends and his alliances, he had swayed her councils to break with France and lean to England. He had made her crush her co-religionists, the Clan of Gordon; he had brought pressure on her to send away her French servants, he had lessened her train of balladists, her masking girls and lute-playing boys. In every direction since he came to Scotland he had bent her to his will. There had been dangers, he had had to be alert and prompt, and these had been surmounted. Bothwell, so imperious and implacable, dared come no further than the Border where he slunk in secrecy, in helpless defiance. Huntly, too, heir of the disaster of Corrichie, was a broken man. No doubt, there were others of the Lords of the Congregation who murmured against Moray, but he was able to deal with them and on the whole they suffered him and liked his leadership.

He knew them all, their characters, their lusts, their greed, their wishes, their estates. Here and there, judiciously as occasion arose, he bribed or threatened, menaced or soothed. He had his agents everywhere-, he did not economize in his system of spies and secret intelligencers, who searched in the most uncommon places for information to take to their master. He relied on his great wealth, he was gorged with lands and revenues and spent very little.

John Knox was his friend, and John Knox swayed the people. Morton was his friend and Morton was a stout prop of the godly, one whom, despite his black reputation, was regarded as an upright patriot and a sound statesman. Maitland was his friend, and Maitland was clever enough for any sinister lie or devilment that any man might put his hand to in the interest of business.

Moray stretched himself like one taking his ease after long tension. The prospect was fair, the prospect was good. There was sincerity behind the smile with which he informed Mr. Thomas Randolph, Elizabeth's envoy, that there could be no question of a match between the Queen's Grace and Lord Darnley.

The people, who saw the danger of a Papist king pass by, the Hamiltons, who breathed again after this swift menace of a Lennox domination, looked gratefully towards Moray.

It was Maitland who said to the King's bastard, from no other motive, Moray thought, than a desire to disturb any man's satisfaction and twist anything simple to something difficult:

"What does she do so long at Stirling? Lie abed and dream or listen to Mary Seaton at her prayers?"

"Am I to be for ever checking a child at its play? Let her be."

"Do you think that because she is quiet, she is harmless?" asked Maitland with stinging bitterness.

"I have no need," smiled Moray, "to torture myself with vain surmises. I have those who watch for me in Stirling."

"Do they report nothing?"

"Nothing. Lord Darnley and his wild young Papists ride about and fly hawks and try hounds they brought from England. The Queen keeps to her room. In two days' time Lord Darnley goes to his father's castle in Glasgow. Perhaps they will never meet again, save in company."

Maitland, playing with the sharp tags that fastened the laces at his wrist, asked suddenly:

"The Italian is in young Darnley's train. Have your spies told you that?"

"They have mentioned him," replied Moray, unruffled. "There is no matter for conjecture there. I think young Darnley is like his father--idle, lazy with tongue and pen, not content unless he is in the saddle and the fresh air. This foreigner writes for him, keeps his accounts, mends his lute-strings, ties his laces. What more is there to say, what, at all, is there to wonder at?"

"I have puzzled at it," said Maitland. "It is a very swift promotion for a base Italian to get so high in so short a space and in a great household, too."

But Moray, with a gesture that reminded Maitland of the Queen in her impatient moods, shrugged, half-turning his shoulder, and would have no more of the subject.

"When does she return to Edinburgh?"

Moray, in his settled triumph, replied:

"When I send for her. I think it is well to leave her where she is a little longer."

"You like," said Maitland, "to think of her as safe, far from the temptations and toils of the court, a jewel locked in the casket of which you have the key, restrained from harm. Well, I see your mind and think it too strange for belief."

Moray challenged him with a look and Maitland insisted:

"Yes, I think it strange, Lord Moray, that one so acute as you, should soothe your fears with syrup."

These words, spoken by one whose intellect and discernment he much respected, might have started a tempestuous debating in Moray's mind, but he quelled his own fears. Maitland was too quick, too subtle, he often saw a tanglement where all was straight. Moray would be wise, he would be circumspect, he would, as ever, be watchful, but he was sure that there was no occasion for apprehension. The Queen was safe in Stirling.

Two days later his sense of security, of triumph, dissolved like mists before a sudden sun. The Queen, without waiting for his command or suggestion, returned to Holyrood. Lord Darnley had not gone to Glasgow—he rode through Edinburgh by her side.

Moray was at the palace to meet them and, as the young man came up the narrow staircase, the Queen's half-brother saw on the golden boy's fair right hand the blood-red ring, circling, like a wound, his little finger.

Lord Darnley went to his father's lodgings in Edinburgh where the old man fumed and waited.

April rain danced on the greenish glass of the window while Lennox, in a red fur coat, bent over a fluttering fire.

"You have left me without news," he said sullenly. "Were you so occupied I might not have had a letter?"

"I wrote twice," replied the young man briefly. "Bah! By the hand of that Italian, and your mother was always proud of your scholarship. I wish she had had you taught fewer dainty tricks and more respect and manly virtues."

The young man smiled acidly at this meaningless rebuke. He stood by the window and unbuttoned the high collar of his riding-coat. Lennox saw at once that it was of purple velvet lined with sable.

"Where did you get that?" he demanded, pointing at the gaudy finery. "More debts. You know I am burdened enough already."

"It was a gift from the Queen," said the young man, over his shoulder.

Lennox stared, eyes bulging, lips loose, avid interest in his puffy face.

"The Queen! She gave you presents! How did you spend your time at Stirling?"

Lord Darnley opened his lips and was about to speak, but was silent. He was troubled how to put what he had to say into words. He was indeed indifferent to his father; he would have had the old man miles away with his mother in England. He was free of him; he was a man now, settled in his estate: he did not want to be questioned, forced to answer, make evasions. Well, better come to the truth at last. He

looked down at the small, red ring on his finger and reassured himself that what he was about to say was the truth.

"I am married to the Queen."

The highest hopes of Lennox had not expected this. He was quite overwhelmed, and stammered.

Darnley stopped him.

"You must be silent, sir, or it may be dangerous. We are still in her hands, I don't know what she may do. Moray will be against us, and all the others I expect."

"What will that matter if you are King."

"King! I did not say that! I said I was married to the Queen. It was secret--the ceremony was in her chamber."

"Well, that should be good enough," said Lennox eagerly. "A ceremony, there was a priest and witnesses?" The young man looked away, tossed his head and flushed. "There was a ceremony, and before witnesses," he replied obstinately. "She holds it lawful and that's enough. We shall be married again, and publicly, with full rites. She is waiting her chance."

"She! The Queen! That's how you speak of her!" Lennox sat staring into the fluttering flame. "Well, well! I suppose I'm to know nothing about it. It was sudden and might have been managed better. Yet, I don't know, I suppose you have her firmly. Wedded and bedded, eh?"

Darnley did not reply. His father looked at him, laughed coarsely and shrugged.

"I hardly thought--" he began, then laughed again, his lips trembling in the midst of the fat, wrinkled cheeks. Darnley said impatiently:

"Say no more about it until I give you leave. I have given you the secret, let that be sufficient."

"Ha! the King so soon!" grinned Lennox, not without bitterness. "Remember, Harry, I too am a pretender to the Crown. Well, what will she give us? I want the Lieutenancy of the Marches, of the Border. You should have a revenue, too, to enable you to live in royal state. Am I to run in debt," he added, with awkward humour, "to help keep the King?"

"No king as yet, I do assure you, sir, though she has promised me the Crown Matrimonial."

"So soon, so amorous. Well, you have spent your time profitably. Wedded and bedded--so lusty, so impatient!"

He sat gaping at the tall young man; he was scarcely able to credit this sudden flick of fortune's wheel. He had had his hopes and his fears, doubts this way and that, but he had scarcely ever pictured the possibility that his son might marry the Queen within six weeks of first catching sight of her. And so secret, too! He began to laugh with real pleasure as he thought of the Hamiltons and Moray, slapped his knees as he contemplated their fury. Maitland, too. He would slink away through the city like a snake.

He looked at his son, who stood sullen and ill-at-ease by the window watching the sliding drops melting one into the other.

"Well," he said, trying to speak like a man of the world, "you must see this is no false step on her part, that she is not indulging a whim. You must go quietly, Harry, for a while, at least. But press your

advantage, boy."

He stopped abruptly, recalling that his son was, as he had said, the Queen's husband. He must, then, speak of her with a respect that he would never again feel. Darnley seemed to sense what was behind the unfinished sentence:

"You irritate me with your hints," he said rudely. "To-night I lodge in the palace, you may come too if you want. It is as well that Moray and his creatures should begin to know us." He added, with awkward insolence: "I will have David Rizzio as my secretary, he will receive a good wage. Be civil to him, if you please, I owe him for much service."

Lennox understood at once. Of course Harry, woman-bred as he was, would never have done it alone. The knave had been useful, then.

Moray slept uneasily. He was much given to dreaming; in his visions of the night all his native day fears escaped and flew loose in the darkened heavens.

He thought he walked across the land he loved, the rough heather yielded beneath his feet, the dark hills lowered to right and left of him, the thick clouds were low and almost pressing on his brow. Before him stalked a gigantic figure in armour whom he took to be his guide, his protector, perhaps his providence. It walked where there was no path and Moray followed, over round pale pebbles, dark moss soaked by mountain streams, by the wild wet winds which beat on his face.

He was troubled by his lonely, toilsome march, yet all his hopes were on the armoured giant in front of him, who promised him the confirmation of all his desires—a crown and a queen. They were

hidden somewhere ahead, on the inaccessible mountain-top draped by the wraithlike clouds.

On Moray walked, on, on in his dream. The moon came out and shone on the clear tinkling water-breaks and on the heather that was the colour of old, dried blood. Moray was exhausted; his vigour slipped from him like a cloak thrown away, but the tramp of the majestic armed figure did not relax, and at last they reached together the top of a mountain, where there was a cairn surmounted by a monument of grey stones.

The figure turned; Moray looked at a closed visor. He thought this figure was himself, symbolic of his fortunes, mighty, majestic, impregnable, implacable upon the highest mountain-top. He peered to see the circlet on the helm, and there it was, the royal crown of Robert Bruce, while on the red and yellow scarf twisted across the breastplate he saw the thistles gleam in gold—King, King of Scotland.

He implored the figure to speak, but it did not move. Moray, in his dream, then leant forward and unbuckled the helmet-strap and let the visor fall. He gazed into a void, the helmet was empty. As he stared, the armour fell to pieces where it stood, a heap of useless metal on the mountain-top, gorgets and vambrace, greave and breastplate, helm and crown, and as he knelt down beside this collapse of all his high hopes, he saw that they had withered to rusty shafts of discarded metal.

He woke, half-shrieking in his sleep, but what he said had nothing to do with the vision which had troubled him, which was instantly dismissed from his mind as it had instantly been begotten. He muttered, turning from his placidly sleeping wife:

"Where did the boy get the red enamelled ring?"

Moray was in conference with the Queen. Gravely, and without a hint of emotion he put before her all the business he had done in her absence.

The Queen lay back in her chair and smiled. At first she listened with discreet interest to all his wise judgments and shrewd remarks, putting in now and then a gentle comment of her own. Then she grew tired of these pretences and broke out into open mockery.

"Why are you so dull and heavy to-day? You are like one of your own puritanical creatures, James, with your formality."

But he had determined, before he engaged on this interview, that she should not move him to anger, nor incite him to any display of emotion, and he had been prepared for some such test as this. So he answered dryly:

"There must be in this kingdom of yours some responsible person to manage these matters."

She did not answer, save by an increase of the smile on her painted lips.

"Someone," he said, keeping his voice steady, "must work for your comfort, your luxury, and your estate."

"Did I ask you to do so?" she murmured very softly, and he answered her challenge, still keeping his voice low. "Have you asked any other man to do so?"

"Now you would play the tyrant," she pouted, "and find out all my secrets."

"No," he shook his head. His serenity was not feigned, for he felt

master of her when she was in this kind of mood. "It is not your secrets which trouble me, but those things which everyone talks about, even the rabble in the streets."

"Ah, so I must face my faults again!" sighed the Queen, mischievously. "What are they? Tell me them all, James! How happy I was in Stirling without your rebukes."

And yet when you returned I felt so safe."

"Ah!" said the Queen, "there's the crux of it! You felt so safe, James, but I, perhaps I never felt safe since I returned to Scotland."

He was armed against her; he had come prepared to withstand her artfulness.

"The people are condemning your behaviour: the favours you show Lennox and his young son." He paused to give his taunts emphasis. "This young, insolent boy."

"So you find him," said the Queen, unmoved.

Moray looked down into her pale, smooth features. How could he ever have trusted her, how ever have gone surety for her honesty to Maitland--Maitland who understood so much better than himself this sly creature with whom it was their great misfortune to deal!

"I tell you, Mary, that you have betrayed us all. You do not realize the perils in which we stand and I am here to warn you. Perhaps I alone care enough for you to do so. You behave so carelessly that anyone might believe--" he paused, remembering his resolve to hold back his anger.

"I have no reason to care what they believe. No one in this country has ever loved me, no one cares for my name nor reputation save

those few whom I brought with me and that very man you mock me with..."

"A pauper!" took up Moray, breathing quickly, "a coarse boy! One who has neither character nor estate." The Queen's hand rose to her breast.

"He has the right!" she whispered, "he has the right! He is a prince and as well-born as I am. I know why you hate him, Moray."

He turned his head away, pausing for a second, because she had used his formal title.

"I did not say I hated him."

"I know it," smiled the Queen, "look at me and say you do not."

He returned the challenge of her cruelty:

"It would be truer to say that I despise him, Mary. I never thought to see my work for Scotland or for you hampered by someone like him. Remember," he added, "there is no one behind you--none--except those I choose to put there, and if you take him--"

"If I choose him," murmured the Queen, motionless as she sat in the great chair.

"He'll not last long," sighed Moray, "and it might be, in his fall, that he would drag you down."

The Queen sat up suddenly and leaned forward.

"Do you threaten me?" she asked. She seemed neither alarmed nor offended, but rather as if she were excited, stimulated, even pleased by Moray's bold front.

"It is Scotland who menaces you," he answered with admirable calm. "You must not take this boy. I have stood aside since you returned from Stirling. But it has gone on too long. A caprice is all very well; but it must come and go like a spurt of wildfire. Gifts are exchanged--"

"But if it is not a caprice?" interrupted the Queen, smiling. "Suppose this is the man for me? Suppose I choose him, take him, crown him, place him above you in estate?"

Moray leant towards her from the high ornate table where he sat; the likeness between the two faces, the heavy lined face of the man and the delicate face of the woman, was very apparent in that moment of emotion. Something subtle, almost indefinable in the two countenances, showed distinctly--the similarity in the thick lids, the almost invisible slanting brows, the curved full lips. They defied each other and the Queen's spirit rose to the encounter. She seemed to relish this conflict with this man of her own blood, the only one who up to now had been her master.

"What do you suspect me of?" she asked directly.

"It is not a question of what I suspect you of, but what is said in the streets and taverns, what the Lords whisper when they meet together, what the women sneer when they nudge each other as you pass--one word that I must not say."

Then, very carefully, for he was making a fierce effort over rising fury, he said:

"If you are fond of him, Mary, teach him not to be so insolent, teach him to be civil, at least to me."

She shrugged her shoulders and answered carelessly: "I shall make

him Earl of Ross."

Moray looked down at his hands. He was glad to see that his firm fingers did not quiver; he had command over himself, perhaps still over her—even if she was what the common people said.

"There is another person you must warn," he said—his tone was that of a king to a subject—"that presumptuous, strutting Italian."

"Whom do you mean?" The Queen still smiled.

"I mean Lord Darnley's lackey whom he keeps to run his errands and fawn on him."

The Queen had a little plume of black feathers at her waist set in a mirror encircled by pearls. She raised this and waved it to and fro with a wide sweeping movement so that the sable tips almost touched Moray's cheeks and then her own.

"Do you think that I should interfere in my cousin's household?"

"You cannot twist words with me, Mary. I say what I have come to say, I speak from what I know. I warn you. Mary, not a man in Scotland who has any worth does not detest these two."

But the black fan continued to wave slowly to and fro. Moray felt it brush against his cold cheek.

"If you intend to have your own way," he said, rising, "be sure that I shall oppose you."

"Perhaps, if it should come to that," smiled the Queen, without moving, "I too have my friends."

"Madame, I do not think so. Except what rabble Lennox could call

together there is no one who would stand behind you and that boy."

"Ah! If you..." breathed the Queen, almost as if she watched something reach a desired climax. "Ah! That now! If you were to call a rebellion, now!"

He made no denial. In silence, carefully, with the precise movements of a business man, he gathered up his papers and parchments, folded them, and put them into his portfolio. Then, as a retreating enemy makes one last backward sally, he demanded:

"How did Henry Stewart come by the small red ring?" She turned this glancingly aside with another question: "When have you see it before?"

"Perhaps the same place where you gave it him, Mary--when you were abed."

The Queen laughed loudly, throwing back her head. "When I was abed, James, when I was abed!"

Mary Seaton sat near the window so that the thin light of a fitful May afternoon might fall upon her work: she was embroidering a map of Scotland. At a long table in the centre of the room the Queen and Lord Darnley played at billiards. The Italian secretary stood near Mary Seaton and handed her the strands of silk as she required them.

The fifth person in the chamber was one who did not often seek this company--Lord Moray, whose watchful, silent presence seemed to be like a spell to keep the others dumb, for no one spoke; there was an air of tension in all they did. Even the Queen had not her usual mocking good-humour.

She kept her glance on the small balls of ivory and never once raised

her eyes to meet her half-brother's profound gaze.

Moray, leaning against the arras, made no concealment of his keen observation of these three people whom he seemed to be, in a manner, judging: the Queen, mute and secretive, every line of whose face and figure was so well known to him; Henry Stewart, tall and heavy, who seemed, uneasily reserved, yet who now and then turned a smile of boyish simplicity towards his opponent and who sometimes looked about him as if he were endeavouring to discover some way of escape. Mary Seaton, usually so placid, to-day seemed grieved and troubled. She peered continually over her shoulder at the two playing billiards and watched them as she took the silk from David Rizzio. Often she seemed about to speak, yet was silent, not knowing how to choose her words.

The Italian himself was quite complacent. His dark eyes, expressionless as those of an animal, returned blankly Moray's sharp stare. He was very patient in matching the difficult colours of the map of Scotland and was unmoved by Moray's contemptuous scrutiny. He had the calm of one whose singleness of purpose could endure any amount of analysis.

Moray hated this upstart with an instinctive and exhaustive loathing. To him the Italian, raised by the whim of Henry Stewart out of obscurity to this intimate servitude, was detestable as a scorpion, a snake, a toad, any fabled creature that carries poison and disaster.

This bitter judgment of Moray was not disturbed by the fact that there was nothing offensive in the exterior of the Italian. His shape was elegant and set off clothes that, though rich and well-chosen, were not beyond his station. His elegantly modelled face expressed melancholy and refinement, tenderness, and a desire to please. There was something attractive in the foreign fashion in which he wore his long, smooth hair, which looked the colour of old bronze.

His hands, too, were fine, those of a careful penman, of a musician-- of a picker of locks and pockets, thought Moray, with a rising disgust. He was not deceived by this superficial grace; his wits, naturally acute, had been sharpened by a wide experience; he was certain that the Italian was evil. Had he been able to do so, he would instantly have called up two honest Scotch fellows and had Rizzio thrown out of the Queen's apartments, nay, out of the palace, on to the dungheap, there to rot amid the stench and corruption that was his due, and from whence, doubtless, he had sprung.

Lord Darnley found the presence of Moray and the tension of the room intolerable. He glanced angrily at the silent, sombre man leaning against the tapestry and, with a piteous affectation of ease, sauntered over to where Mary Seaton worked in the fitful light. The Italian, eager to please his master, pointed out how prettily the contours of Scotland were growing on the canvas.

"Where are Lord Moray's possessions?" asked the young man in a loud voice.

Mary Seaton looked bewildered and did not respond, but David Rizzio, with a deft finger, pointed out Lord Moray's lands, tracing them here, there, on the half-filled-in canvas.

"It is too much," said Henry Stewart, "too much for a subject!" He looked defiantly at the Queen as if at once challenging her anger and appealing for her support.

Moray said quietly:

"Sir, you must ask my pardon for that."

The Queen, the billiard cue still in her hand, stood silent a second and no one knew which way her humour would go. Then she turned

her back on Lord Darnley and, smiling at her half-brother, said:

"Of course he will ask your pardon."

She looked over her shoulder at the young man and commanded him to do this.

Henry Stewart stared. He could not credit that he was being rebuked. A slow fury seemed gathering behind his silence, and the Italian, effacing himself, bending with humble interest over the silks, contrived to touch his arm, a gentle yet forcible pressure.

Lord Darnley, in an expressionless voice, said:

"I am sorry, sir, my words have given you offence. I withdraw them and apologize."

Moray bent his head and left the room, but not before he had seen the strange glance of the Italian, no longer like that of an animal, placid and meaningless, but full of calculating wickedness.

As the door closed Henry Stewart broke out into a passion of distress. How long was he thus to be baited, goaded, how long to be set beneath everyone when he should lead all! He turned impetuously on his servant, whose restraining touch he had almost mechanically obeyed as the slow mind will obey the signal of the quick one, as the mule responds to the flick of his driver's whip and afterwards kicks.

"You should have allowed me to say what I wished to say. Why should I have apologized?"

"But sir," replied the Italian, "by doing that you had the victory. You left him dumb, defeated. You showed your breeding, your princely nature, made him appear boorish and clumsy. Sir," and the southern

voice was like a caress, "you can afford to wait."

Without any regard for the presence of the Queen or that of Mary Seaton, who hung constrained and hesitating over her unfortunate embroidery, Lord Darnley began to rail against Moray, against his followers, against all the lords and nobles of Scotland who had all flouted him, insulted him and done their best to injure him since he had first come to Scotland.

The Queen, still leaning against the billiard table, listened with seeming idleness. Her attitude was one of fatigue. She considered the two men disputing before her in the window-place, the master so harsh and haughty, choosing his words with impatient clumsiness and small command of language, repeating again and again the same phrases, frowning, keeping his hand on his hips, moving awkwardly in an ill-expressed, almost inarticulate rage; the servant, elegant, sly, with his strange, exquisitely modelled face, all his words clever, adroit, elegantly chosen, flattering, pleasing, soothing. There was something leonine about Henry, so large, imposing and golden, and something of the delicate fox about the Italian, so elegant and clever. Yes, she smiled to her self at her own simile. She had seen a picture in a book, *The Lion and the Fox*, a large, stupid beast being at once soothed and deceived by the wiles and flatterings of the small, crafty animal.

What a deal of trouble David Rizzio saves me, she thought; if he were not here it would be I who should have to coax this stupid boy into a good mood.

She looked warmly at the Italian, silently thanking him for his brilliancy, his gaiety, and his quickness.

Lord Darnley grumbled himself to silence-, he was appeased but not satisfied. He still muttered that everyone treated him with uncivil,

contemptuous bitterness. And why? He had offended none.

Moray waited like a lackey on his mistress's pleasure in the corridor close to the door through which the Queen must pass, soon, to the council chamber. He felt full of discord, misery, and unrest, yet knew he was able to control these distresses. He seemed a peaceful man; there had been no change during the last few weeks in his placid demeanour, no neglect in his exercise of his duties, his attention to his necessary business. Yet his whole complex nature was at war, with himself and with outside influences.

The Queen came, opening and shutting the door impetuously, and turned as if to pass him; a quick sweep of a black gown, a swing of her white veil, a lift of her shoulder and a laugh and Moray had caught her wrist.

"It does not matter in the least whether or not you go to the council to-day, but it matters that I speak to you, perhaps for the last time."

She was at once mocking:

"For the last time! You have said that before."

"One warning," he reminded her, "like one kiss, must be the last." He stared at her in agony. He could not believe that this passionate and pleasant woman was really lost to all his dreams of her—a crowned queen of his race, a noble queen. Pride of family, possessive affection and bitter jealousy coloured his words, though he tried to keep them impersonal and be the mentor talking to the scholar, the man rebuking the child.

"Those three in there, Mary, become your close, almost your only intimates—a stupid boy who does not know himself, a rascal whose name I detest, a silly girl with her head full of superstition."

"Let go my wrist," smiled the Queen, pulling free of him. She did not attempt to escape but leaned against the dark panelling of the corridor and looked at him with no loss of temper nor dignity. They had this in common, these two children of the same king, that all they did was touched with greatness and nobility, though in the woman this was light and smiling, in the man, heavy and austere.

"So you put them all together in a breath," she said.

A prince, a gentlewoman, a servant."

"You put them all together in your affections, Mary." He took her hand again, and now with unconscious tenderness. "Before God, I speak only for your sake. I would keep you unsmirched. There are some things I would not even have you know, there are some creatures at whom I would not have you look. These hangers-on of the court make but a dance of marionettes. Heed them not! They are lawless and uncontrolled and seek only their own advantage."

"Alas!" she mocked softly, "who does not?"

"Perhaps," said he, speaking low and hurriedly, for he knew not when the door might open and Henry Stewart and his Italian and the half-imbecile Mary Seaton come out, "perhaps you put me on that level, and there you are wrong. I have before pledged myself to keep you where you are, smooth your way, keep the ugly and the cruel and the coarse-grained from you--"

"I know, I know!" she interrupted again, "and I have promised that you shall do it. I have said that I am glad and thankful that you shall do it, but--"

He saw by the look in her eyes that she was about to lie to him, to make neat, pretty excuses, perhaps only the little lies and the trivial

excuses she so loved and that were so unimportant, but he was not in the mood for anything but truth.

"I can but watch," he said.

Her gaiety clouded over, her voice became sad.

"Come apart with me, James, into the--no, you will not enter the chapel nor my oratory. I thought if we prayed together it would make these tangles easier to unravel, but I had forgotten for a while that you are a heretic."

He was not offended at this absurdity. She led him down the corridor, their fingers linked together, into a tall room which their father had used. The shelves were filled by fine clasped books with gold stamped backs and long markers hanging from the seldom opened pages. The narrow lancet window looked on the park where from this distance May leaves looked like a gaudy veil on the green boughs. Moray remembered that winter day when he had stood in the midst of that park and seen the hare leer at him, and his thoughts were full of sorcery, of witchcraft, and of infernal incitements. Yet he put these away from him and faced the woman, quietly putting before her the claims of reason, of prudence, and of common sense. Then his rhetoric was broken, his voice faltered and fell silent. He perceived that she, sitting at the narrow table where her father had often mourned in a brooding solitude, was sighing sadly.

A compassionate fondness overwhelmed him, everything was forgotten in a terror lest this brilliant, brittle creature should languish, fade, and perhaps die. Lately his secret, anxious scrutiny had noticed her as much altered, not so swift and laughing, falling sometimes into melancholy, her dignity changed into false merriment, her lively speech overcast.

She was whispering in French to herself and he could not understand what she said, for her voice was so low, her lips hidden behind the shielding hands. He offered her in eager single-heartedness all that he had to offer--his talents, his power, his strength, his influence, his wealth, the promise that he had made so often before, to keep Scotland and the throne for her and for her only.

"I know you think I have worked because of ambition, Mary, and love of authority, but that is not so, or only partly so. It is for you, you only!"

She looked up at him; her face, marred by tears, was the colour of a pearl. He had his second ecstasy; he believed that they understood each other perfectly. She accepted his homage and his assurance that he would be able to perform with triumphant success all that he promised. Nothing was any longer dark or confused between them. But she withdrew herself from this clarity, which for that second he had believed transfigured their relations.

He began to smile; he knew that she was going to use him, to lull him, perhaps to flatter. He flung out his hand sternly and said:

"No! I'll be neither cheated nor soothed."

She touched her moist eyes fastidiously with her handkerchief.

"I am going to speak to you of Earl Bothwell," she smiled. "He never came to answer the charges against him. I think he has returned to France."

"It often pleases you," returned Moray, livid, "when I talk to you seriously, to put Earl Bothwell before me. While I rule in Scotland he will not stay long, even on the Border."

"While you rule," said the Queen under her breath.

"So I said, Mary--while I rule! Take care, my child, how you displace me and make another your master."

He left her with a firm and resolute step.

The Queen remained alone in the little closet where she was sure no one would find her. She would not, after all, go to the council chamber to-day; very likely they would not miss her. It would not matter; they took no heed of what she said, she had no influence over any of them. She felt towards them all a deep hostility.

She was not interested in Scotland nor in its inhabitants. Sometimes she thought that she hated the country, though she liked the rides between the hills, over the heather, and beside the riverlets; she liked even sometimes the misty, rainy weather, the high winds. She had contrived to get some of the palaces to her liking, yet what was the country to her but an antique relic, handed down from one of her forbears to another until at last it came to rest in her frail, indifferent hands. Whatever her contempt of the country she would be queen in it; since she could not rule in France she would rule in Scotland.

She thought of the father whom she had never seen, who had sat in this closet with his melancholy reflections, his ambitious designs mute in his mind. A gallant, brilliant, handsome man, dead of a broken heart. The same malady had vanquished her grandfather. Beyond that, all the kings from whom she was descended had died violently.

She rose, sighed, and put her hands on her waist. She hated making plans or looking ahead. When the crisis came she would make and follow out a rapid, clever decision. Taken by surprise she could always act with promptitude and courage, but to plan ahead, think out something prudent and cunning, that she cared for not at all. Yet she liked beguiling and deceiving people, weaving nets of looks and

glances and sighs and half-heard words about them; this, to have any pleasure in it, must be done carelessly in a matter of a moment, on impulse.

She turned over in her mind with slow relish the recollection of the emotion of the man who had just stood beside her, the man who should have been a great prince, who was also a child of the king who had once mused in this quiet closet.

She liked to think she had his tormented but steadfast love to fall back on. That, and the sly love of Maitland, had a different quality from any other passion she had inspired. She believed that she could not exhaust it, that she might do as she chose and always find this devoted love for her dominant in the heart and mind of those two men. Moray would do as he had promised--hold her steady on her throne.

And for the rest of it? She sighed again, walking up and down. Moray would rage when he discovered that she had chosen Henry Stewart. That would almost destroy his fidelity, but not quite. He had said always intolerable things when he had preached and rated; but she would only have to smile and speak humbly, plead in a suppliant tone and he would come forward to serve her again, but that would have to be on other terms. She could do without him, his conscientiousness, his ability, his hard work. Yet, she would like to be free of him, of Maitland, of all of them who clustered so close about her; menacing, rebuking, spying, she would disperse them all.

She considered carefully the terms in which Moray had spoken of her three attendants--Henry Stewart and his servant and Mary Seaton. Fools, rascals, and imbeciles, he had named them. Well, he was only wise in one instance. Her fleeting thoughts dwelt on Henry Stewart to whom she had so impetuously and proudly pledged herself. Sometimes he wearied her, sometimes he was difficult and

tedious, sometimes even, she seemed to have no power over him; he would prefer his sports, his games, his English gentlemen and servants. Yet, in the evenings, when Mary Seaton would admit him by the secret ways to her chamber, when David Rizzio would guard the door, when she would be perfumed, painted, clad in thin gauze, her hair fastened with gold pins, then he loved her as she loved him, in so intense and beautiful a fashion that the whole world seemed heroic.

Her smile deepened with her memories. She teased him, she vexed him, they were estranged for days together; but always there was the reunion when his beauty, his simplicity, and his strength seemed to her like precious jewels brought out from a casket and secretly delighted in.

Two people made these hidden joys possible--Mary Seaton, who was almost weak-minded and ought to have been a nun, no doubt, and who was faithful and reliable, and the Italian, very like, as Moray had said, what men would call a rascal--a pimp. But how dexterous, subtle, pliable, and unscrupulous! The Queen put her finger to her lips as she thought of David Rizzio. No doubt he loved her too; he did not serve her and her furtively wedded husband wholly for pay. He loved her, in an odd profound fashion; he valued, even cherished, her prodigal beauty.

One day while they were at Stirling she had been seated by the fire in the twilight of her tall room, while a late storm of hail beat upon the windows. The Italian had come in, with his step so trained to lightness that she had not known he was there till he was close to her chair. He had been looking, he whispered, for his master, and she had said that Darnley was not there, but, she thought, in the oratory. Though he was not religious minded there were times when he would pray with childish fervour.

Then the Italian had sunk down at her feet and stretched himself out like a hound on the silk rugs, quite still and tranquil, the waves of his dark hair touching the tips of her shoes. She had said nothing, accepting his silence graciously. It had seemed to her that something had passed between them, that they had been engaged together in some spiritual adventure, some stimulation of the mind, which they had shared. It was as if he made a confession to her of his miserable origin, his base struggles, of his vile and subservient conditions, and it was as if she gave him absolution in that moment of secluded peace.

The Queen blazed at Easter. She held the great Feast of the Resurrection as no man could remember it being held in Scotland before, not even in the days before the monasteries were despoiled and John Knox and the Lords of the Congregation set up over the land.

There was more music, more lights, more priests and vestments, more singing and flowers than ever there had been before. The Queen put off her mourning dress, her languid ways, her air of waiting on circumstance; there was something about her step and her look that was assured and triumphant. Hitherto an organ had been sufficient to make the music in the royal chapel, but now there must be violins, sackbuts, lutes, and harps, as well as drums and trumpets to celebrate the rising of Christ from the tomb. The Queen appeared among her courtiers and before her subjects as if at a hazardous pitch of exaltation. She rejoiced and expanded in this great festival of the Church, while the Puritans drew aside, sour and menacing, on the verge of rebellion.

The bells pealed, music played; the Roman Catholics in the Queen's household--French, English, and Scotch--went joyously arrayed, laughed and talked confidently together as if they believed the true Church could be replanted in this barren land from which it had been

torn up and flung aside on the mudheap.

Feeling among the people in the city, among the Lords and the preachers, was duly reported to the Queen. Thomas Randolph, Queen Elizabeth's envoy, spoke to her as boldly as he dared of the scandal her conduct was giving, of the indecorum of this flaunting of the forbidden Faith, the offence given to England by the pampering of Henry Stewart, the favouritism shown to his father; they almost alone among the Lords were Papists and could follow her to her gaudy, Romish festivals.

The Queen looked at him out of her soft eyes and her words were quite cool and alert:

"I have taken much good advice from England, been very deferential to my sister the Queen, perhaps the time is approaching when I shall choose for myself, take my own way."

"To inevitable perdition," muttered Mr. Randolph in his heart.

But she was so gracious and gentle even when she spoke these defiant words that he could feel nothing for her but compassion. He thought her position desperate--she had no money, no credit, no ally; the whole country was hostile to her mood. She had compromised herself almost past redemption with that shallow, detested youth. And as if that were not sufficient folly, she had chosen the most unlikely favourite a prince could light on; an Italian scoundrel whom no one had heard of before, who never had the air of a gentleman. She said he wrote her foreign letters for her, that she trusted him with most of her secrets. The Englishman could find no cue to this labyrinth of the Queen's emotions and knew not what to report to the English Court nor what to believe himself.

Elizabeth had summoned Lennox and his son home, for they were

English subjects and had, their mistress declared, outstayed their leave in Scotland. Randolph had taken this opportunity to wait upon the Earl and under the excuse of pressing his Queen's demands, to endeavour to learn something of the secret mind of these two penniless princes.

Lennox had excused himself in incoherent bluster, a stupid man's defence which might have meant anything or nothing, but Mr. Randolph thought he had detected some deep emotion in the young man's bewildered, almost piteous. "What would you do if you were in my place, Mr. Randolph? Before God, I do not know what to do, yet I do not think I shall return."

When the imposing religious festival of Easter was over, the Queen turned her volatile mind to earthly splendour. She gave great banquets in the long gallery at Holyrood, when anyone who wished might come to drink and eat, to jest and laugh. In the evening there was dancing by the light of torches, where the Queen gave her hand to any of her court who asked for it, where she moved sparkling with her famous jewels, the gems of France and Scotland, through the skilful patterns of the pavan or galliard.

Then her extravagance took another turn: she put on a plain gown and, with such of her gentlewomen as could be induced to countenance the prank, ran abroad in the streets and by-ways of Edinburgh, collecting money from every passer-by until she could hardly carry the velvet bags of coins. With the money thus obtained she gave a banquet at which she sat herself, while all the citizens were allowed to pass along the gallery and stare. Afterwards there was free wine and sweetmeats, toys and trifles, and the remainder of the money flung back again to the pushing, curious, half-hostile crowd.

Yet through all this, however common she made herself, she was

nevertheless a creature of moonshine and of youth, a star of celestial radiance that could flash in the mud and out again untainted.

On one of these wild days Mary Seaton wept while she unbraided the bright chestnut hair.

"Why do you cry, Mary?" asked the Queen. "Are not these happy hours? Do you not know how soon we shall be free?"

"I weep because of the things that people say of you, because of the way the vulgar talk. Because--oh, madame!--because you are a wedded wife before God and none knows it."

The Queen unlaced her gown and looked at her white, pure bosom in the mirror.

"What would you have me be, Mary?"

"Unspotted before God, madame."

"You would have me honest, chaste?"

"Every woman should be that, madame."

"It is only the stupid who can be so single-minded, so good. Don't you understand?--I am not simple." She kicked off her slippers and looked down at her perfect bare feet.

"I do nothing wrong, I harm nobody."

Mary Seaton did not reply. Sadly she picked up the Queen's jewels where they had dropped on to the silk carpet. The windows were open on the June night and the faint warmth blew into the perfumed room. Mary Seaton knew, and the Queen knew, that beyond the palace and the park was much tumult and half-suppressed

discontent. The little city was full of armed men; most of the nobles had called up their retainers from their estates and villages. Everywhere you turned in the streets of Edinburgh you could see soldiers in armour, rough fellows from the north armed with swords and daggers.

Moray and Maitland were perpetually in each other's houses. Those who waited in their ante-chambers could often hear their voices raised high in altercation.

Ruthven, Argyll, Cassilis, Hume, Herries, went up and down with airs of agitation and haste.

"When will you tell them you are married?" urged Mary Seaton.

The Queen loosened her hair.

"Oh, Mary, I like this game I play. When it is known he is my husband shall I love him so well?"

"Oh, madame, you name it love!"

"For want of a better word, child."

"Am I to admit him, madame, if he comes to-night?"

"No, nor yet to-morrow night."

"Is it not cruel to him, madame, this holding off? Yesterday he was almost in tears, I thought."

"And yet he raged!"

"Madame, you are making a fool of him. Can he forget that? It is a blight upon his manhood?"

"He must do as I bid," said the Queen. "You are his friend, Mary. Warn him to be careful lest he should weary me."

"Alas, madame, would he take such a warning from me?"

"It were the better for him that he took it from someone," replied the Queen carelessly. "We must think out some device for Mary Fleming's wedding. That must be both choice and splendid. But could you fancy William Maitland as a lover?"

"I think, madame, I have no heart or spirit for more festivals. I have danced and sung and sat up late--so often; too much."

"Hush, Mary!" The Queen put her soft hand over the complaining mouth. "You have done it all for love of me and that absolves you in the eyes of Heaven."

The pious girl kissed her mistress's fingers dutifully. She sighed and said:

"Everything is so uneasy abroad. I never saw so many soldiers and armed men in Edinburgh. Everywhere, one thinks there are spies."

"Hush, again!" said the Queen. "I know well enough how the country stands."

"There are lampoons everywhere, ugly pamphlets and ballads. They say there were even some pasted on the palace gates."

"What does it matter if we need not read them?" The Queen took up a blue velvet gown from the bed and threw it over her shift.

"If the Italian should come, admit him."

"Madame, I do not like to do that."

The Queen laughed good-humouredly.

"But, Mary, he comes to write letters for me, as you know. If you wish, you may stay there all the time and watch us at work."

"Madame, I know that Lord Darnley begins to detest him."

"You should call him the Earl of Ross now. Maybe, despite the English protests, I'll make him Duke of Albany."

"Oh, my lord Earl, or my lord Duke, or what you will, my lord your husband, madame...!"

"That's a galling word," smiled the Queen. "Do as I bid you. When Rizzio comes and scratches on the panel, admit him. Come, I will tell you a secret. He writes privately for me to the Pope, the King of Spain, France--letters I would not have anyone in Scotland see or know of. His brother, Giuseppe, who is a clever lad, has found means to take them out of Scotland."

A gleam of happiness passed over Mary Seaton's face; this seemed to her a lawful and generous design. The Queen pressed her advantage.

"Do you not see, Mary--I mean to overturn the State? I have endured quite enough and for long enough. You will see how I, with my husband as I must call him, and such an instrument as David Rizzio, shall pull their plans about their heads. We'll have Mass said yet in every village in Scotland, Mary."

The girl was satisfied; she sighed with relief. This made all that the Queen did sanctified. The Queen saw her friend's expression and smiled mischievously:

"The Pope sent me his blessing, Mary," she remarked, "and promised me some money, too. That is a great secret, is it not? Mind you keep it carefully."

The Queen sat in her closet in the blue gown dictating her secret letters to David Rizzio. She was astonished at what she had accomplished with such celerity and ease. With only the help of this patient foreigner she would be able to upset the policies of men like Moray and Maitland and turn the destiny of an impious kingdom, with as little effort as it took to knock the billiard balls from one end of the table to the other. They thought themselves so invincible, these ponderous men, with their carefully thought out plans. They had forgotten that she was not only a queen but a woman, and though she knew they were always reminding each other that she was French-bred and cardinal-trained, they seemed to have overlooked what that really meant. She had rare talents too; she could use finesse, intrigue delicately.

She snuffed the two candles that stood on the desk where David Rizzio wrote slowly, in his careful cipher. Near his hand were the rough drafts in Mary's own writing of letters to the Duke of Savoy, His Holiness the Pope, the King of France, the King of Spain, and her uncles, the Cardinal and the Duke. All these people would help her to re-establish the true Faith in Scotland.

"How careful you are, David," she said, leaning towards him.

"Madame, the least mistake in the cipher might mean so much."

He leant back in his chair, for his shoulders were stiff from bowing so long over the desk. For two hours he had been in the Queen's closet, working all that while steadily. Giuseppe had found a messenger who was leaving for Italy to-morrow and some of the letters, at least, had to be ready by the dawn.

The Queen gazed at him with admiration. Never had she had a servant so diligent, so uncomplaining, always full of interest and enthusiasm. His mind, too, was very like her own; he would often understand her on the barest speech. In this he was a sharp contrast with Henry Stewart, who was so easily bewildered and confused, who understood nothing unless it was put before him clearly and repeatedly.

By almost imperceptible degrees, during the days at Stirling, David Rizzio had left the service of Henry Stewart for that of the Queen, and now he lived in Holyrood in the official position of the Queen's secretary for her foreign letters. Why might she not keep such a one to write to her relatives and friends abroad? Where could she find a Scotsman with such knowledge of languages, of ciphers?

She was not in the least tired, though she had sat there half the night. She was animated by the success of her tricks, she was inspired by the thought of the future. She could already see the great French ships arriving at Leith, Papal galleys being anchored in the Clyde. the trim ranks of foreign soldiers marching through the streets of Edinburgh, overawing the dirty, insolent rabble. She could see Knox and all his fellow-preachers flying for their lives out of Scotland while patient workmen from Italy and France rebuilt, stone by stone, the broken abbeys, the blackened churches, the cast-down convents. She could see in Holyrood a train of Church dignitaries, a Papal Nuncio, a Cardinal with his train--she would kneel to kiss his ring. No Protestant would dare to show his workaday face and drab clothes on that occasion. Next Easter should be more splendid than the last--she wanted lilies, the trumpets of the angels, like she had had in France. If they would not grow in Scotland she would have them made--curling wood, painted white with jewelled hearts.

A half-sigh of fatigue from the secretary checked her dreams.

"Are you tired, David?" she asked. Her breast was open, her arms half-bare; her air was tender and merry.

She had, from those days in Stirling, always called him by his name. Why not? She called her monkey Florestan, her parrot Pierrot, she had pet names for all her dogs.

"I am not tired, madame, I am thinking."

He leant forward, his elbows on the desk, his face in his long hands. The corners of his fingers lightly raised the long tresses of bronze-coloured hair.

"What are you thinking of then?"

"I am thinking, madame, of this business with which I help you."

He spoke with the utmost deference, and yet with a familiarity which was, somehow, sweet to her, for it conveyed that he had become part of all her schemes and hopes and had no wish nor desire apart from her wishes or desires. And who else was there in Scotland of that mind?

"I am thinking, madame, that you will need men, an armed force. From what I can understand, the Protestants would have almost the whole country behind them."

"Not quite!" The Queen rose. "Finish your letters to-morrow, all but the Italian--that is ready?"

"Yes, madame, it only requires sealing. I have put on it the secret stamp of black wax that we arranged. But for the men? All Scotland would be behind Lord Moray."

"Not all, I think, David. I know where I can get help against the

Protestants."

The secretary had risen, but the Queen got to her feet, standing before the desk as he sealed up the letters and placed them in the bosom of his jacket of ruffled satin. He always went very richly attired; his mistress was lavish with presents far beyond his agreed wage.

"I will tell you a secret, David. There is a man whom I can recall, now in disgrace, who would rouse the north--the Gordon, Lord Huntly."

The Italian looked at her expectantly, very pleased, for nothing gave him more delight than to think of her triumph soon approaching; he saw himself as the favourite of a mighty sovereign.

"There is another who will get me the Border, that is Lord Bothwell. If he is really a sorcerer I shall desire him to blast--ah, several people."

The Italian knew both these great gentlemen to be ruined and disgraced, but he could grasp at once how they might be used in the Papist service.

"You see," said the Queen, "I am not quite unprepared. I have my cavaliers in readiness."

The Italian noted that she had not mentioned her husband as her foremost champion. Delicately, he touched upon this subject, as one who gives a hint without wounding.

"The Lord Henry Darnley, he will lead Your Majesty's armies?"

"Yes. Tell me, David, will he not look splendid in full armour? Blued, gilt, with a vast panache of feathers, yellow, red, above a lion crest?"

"Madame, most magnificent."

"You must go now, David, it is the middle of the night. Mary Seaton will be half-asleep. How patiently she watches for me! She is a good, pious girl. What a pity her lover died. She thinks herself happy in her cold dreams. She says she despises the allurements of lust--which are mere flashes of fire."

The Queen stood by the desk looking intently at the elegant, dark young man. She felt avid for great events, for mighty happenings. She wanted everybody's life emptied into her life; she wanted the pain and rage of Moray, the passion and bewilderment of Henry Stewart, the devotion and fawning service of David Rizzio. She even wanted the services of scoundrels like Earl Bothwell, of the discredited rebels like Earl Huntly. She wanted the meek, half-reproachful tenderness of Mary Seaton and the warm affection of Mary Fleming, the homage and affection of William Maitland.

David Rizzio moved noiselessly behind her, and they left the little closet together. He could scarcely control his delight in thus leaving the apartment of the Queen in the middle of the night: he might almost have been the Queen's lover. Some people thought he was and he took good care to let no one know that he had done no more than touch her hand; after all, how many had done that? Even Giuseppe was doubtful as to the exact place he held in the Queen's regard. David, dropping half-hints, was careful to keep him so. How glad he was that he had been industrious as a boy and in his passion for self-advancement had learnt everything that had come his way which might be useful. He was well trained now; he could do everything that she wanted of him--write her letters, do her ciphers, play a lute, sing a song.

As she herself opened the door for him, he felt such a lift of triumph at seeing the Queen standing there with a candle to light his way down the corridor that it seemed to him as if Henry Stewart had only been the steppingstone to his fortune. He knew, though he pretended

not to, how many nights the Queen's husband had been turned away from her apartment. He knew how the wretched, bewildered youth fretted and sickened in a position that was almost intolerable. Even that very night when the Queen had been sitting with him, the servant, he had heard Mary Seaton arguing in a low tone with Henry Stewart, who had come by the secret way wanting to speak with his wife.

The Queen closed the door and the Italian fumbled in the dark down the corridor. When he reached his own room he lit a lamp, and the first thing he did was to look at himself in the French mirror the Queen had given him. He was pleased with his reflection, even now when he was pale with fatigue. As he gazed at himself, he thought that he compared very well with others, even with princes, even with Henry Stewart.

Not able to sleep for excitement, he went into the next room and roused Giuseppe under the excuse of telling him that in an hour or so he must be on his way with the letter to Italy, which was first to be taken to Leith, where the man with whom they had arranged the matter would be waiting.

Henry Stewart lay in his father's house. He had refused to return to the palace. Lennox was in despair. How often had he not shaken the curtains, staring down at the face of his son with the obstinately closed eyes, and said angrily: "You are the Queen's husband! Why do you not proclaim it out loud? Is she only to acknowledge you by candlelight or in her bed?"

He had repeated those taunts until he was sick of them. There was nothing more to be said on that score. The boy would not act and he, the father, could not, dare not. He might, by meddling, spoil everything. He tried to console himself by thinking that this was some lover's quarrel, but he was really paralysed by an intense fear--a woman like that, a capricious wanton woman, who in a few weeks

had taken him! Might she not in a few weeks leave him! It ought to have been a public wedding at once. This secret ceremony, what had it been? It was invalid, anyhow, without a Papal Dispensation, for they were related within the fourth degree. She might repudiate it, laugh at both of them.

Nagging worries tortured the old man's mind. He wished he had never left England and the wise counsels of his wife. He felt an aversion to Scotland and all that Scotland represented as he sat in the shrouded room while the boy on whom all his hopes had been centred for years lay on the hired bed like a marionette whose strings had been cut.

Restless in his anxiety, the old man rose and peered again into the face of his son. He could not tell if he was sleeping or feigning sleep, or even unconscious: he seemed sunk in a profound lethargy. His round, smooth face looked quite boyish. Timidly, he touched his son's hand lying palm upwards on the coverlet. How hot it was! Lennox touched the brow--it was burning, too, and the hair was wet with sweat.

A fever! The wretched man thought of poison. Had some enemies thought of that way of defeating him? He snatched at his son's shoulders and gripped him so forcibly, called him so piteously that the young man sighed out of his lethargy, opened his eyes, and sat up. When he saw who had disturbed him he tried to repulse his father. But Lennox was persistent. He felt he must know.

"Go back to the Abbey. Speak to her, insist upon an audience. Have you quarrelled? What has she done? Remember with whom you deal--this is a moment for firmness!"

"Sir," interrupted the boy in a voice that pleaded for peace, "I can tell you no more than this, that she is my wife and will not say so. I think

my blood has been poisoned--" He could not find the words to finish the sentence.

But his father finished it for him:

"It is some drug. You have been bewitched."

"I do not know. It is true that I feel ill. I wish that I had never come to Scotland. We understand none of it, you and I."

His senses began to stray as the fever rose. He groaned that the air of the chamber was close, his teeth chattered. "She shuts me out, she laughs at me. Do you hear that? The servant goes in and I'm locked out. She has her secrets but they're not for me."

"You've humbled yourself too much. You should have played the master."

"Sometimes I hate her. She has made me pay too high for a few nights' lodging."

He fell back upon his pillow, overcome by drowsiness; his heavy lids fell over his eyes, but the old man bent over him, pursuing him.

"Come, you are married, you've sworn that to me! How many nights have you passed with her since you came back from Stirling? What was this marriage--a lie to save her reputation? Don't lie there," cried the Earl in a sudden fury of exasperation, "like a fool caught in a silly snare. She's your wife or she's a strumpet; either way we ought to catch her, if you'll leave off whining and raise your head."

The young man did not answer. He was sunk in fever, and his face twitched as if bad dreams disturbed him.

The Queen had completed the correspondence that her lover must

not know of, and her mind, emptied of this preoccupation, turned to him again so when Mary Seaton reminded her that for a week the private door had been shut to him she said: "Open it to-night." After all, she loved him, and she thought of this love with delight, even with a little regret for her cruelty.

She would make up to him for her neglect. She knew how to silence his reproaches, how to soothe his fears, disperse his jealousies. And yet, perhaps, she would say nothing at all, merely rest in his arms, a helpless woman in a man's embrace. He was stupid with words, and so often did not understand. Perhaps she would ask him to sing.

Mary Seaton waited in the privy closet. He always came that way, a convenient entrance to the Queen's apartments, not particularly secret or mysterious but merely a servants' stairway which led to the disused chambers on the floor beneath and then by a subterranean passage to the garden and the church. There was access to this way through the burial ground; a shrubbery of trees cloaked the wall, and one might come and go there freely enough.

Mary Seaton heard the step, heard the key turn in the lock and rose to greet the man whom for her conscience' sake she must regard as the Queen's husband and her King. She was glad that to-night she would not have to say: "You must go back, the Queen is ill," or "the Queen prays," or "the Queen fears that Mary Fleming may come in," or some such other excuse. No, to-night she could stand aside and leave the young man's way free to his wife's chamber.

He did not, as was his custom, knock on the panel or scratch, but used the key which the Queen had given him. It turned in the lock.

But when Mary Seaton saw who it was who entered the room she felt sick with fright for it was not the tall bridegroom who bent his

shoulders in the narrow doorway but the stout form of his father, the Earl of Lennox, muffled to his chin, in the common clothes of a citizen. "Tell Her Grace," he said with a menacing frown, "that her husband is sick and cannot come to-night."

He put aside the girl, and stared rudely across the closet into the bedchamber where the woman, who had suddenly ceased to smile, sat in the huge marriage bed.

The Queen fetched Henry Stewart from his lodgings to Holyrood Palace. He was too ill to stand on his feet and chattered foolishly in the bouts of fever that left him hot and cold by turns, so she had him carried in a litter borne by some of his father's men. Two of her French doctors walked either side of him, and she followed on horseback with the four Maries and the French girls, and the two Italian boys.

All was done openly by the light of day, and the people of Edinburgh crowded to windows and doors and paused in their occupations and hurried down side streets to stare and wonder and say foul things.

The Queen had left off her usual mourning and was attired in an excess of that splendour which had always irritated the people from the moment she had landed at Leith. Her gown was of ruffled yellow silk with a great collar of lace falling open on her bosom and sewn and knotted with pearls. Two long tresses of chestnut hair fell to her waist; she wore her hat with a long, black feather over a coif in the Italian fashion. People asked each other where was her widow's black? Only on State occasions had she been without it during her reign. Were these fineries the signs of another marriage?

The crowd could get no sight of the young man in the litter, for the curtains were drawn. But they knew who it was being borne to the palace and they peered and jostled to get a sight of his father's face

as he rode behind. What could they read from that bloated, sullen countenance? Was this the triumph of the Lennox faction and of Papistry?

Some of them began to hiss the stout old man who had sold the Queen for English gold when she was a child and brought the English over the Border to cut the throats of honest Scots. A few of the women started a murmur against the Queen herself. When she had first ridden through Edinburgh blessings had been called upon her, but there were none to-day.

She looked about, wondering at this enmity, at these faces grim with hostility, these drab, diseased, and filthy creatures who challenged her with looks of hate.

How strange and unfamiliar these people were to her! She stared at them with a fearless curiosity. She felt kindly towards them and wanted them to be happy and contented; when she had money she would fling it abroad with the utmost generosity or spend it on feasts for their benefit. She never interfered with their liberties nor their hideous religion and she had only asked a little toleration for herself. Why then did they dislike her so? There was not one of them, even when she looked directly into the crowd, who threw up his hat and shouted for the Queen.

With her resolute and animated air she took pleasure in the fresh blue day, in the red-tiled houses, the eager faces of children pressed at the windows. The rancour of the crowd did not affect her at all, as she proceeded slowly towards Holyrood Abbey.

The four Maries who followed her were alarmed by this atmosphere of dislike, and Mary Beaton edged her white horse close to that of the Queen and whispered with a smile on her lips as if she uttered some triviality:

"Madame, take notice of the temper of the people. They say many evil words. Some of them look as if they held us in utter contempt."

"These are rogues and churls," said the Queen, good-humouredly; "it matters not what such boors think or say. They are the disciples of John Knox, my Mary. See what joyless, crude creatures he makes of them!"

They were approaching the forecourt of Holyrood House, and there the little escort of armed men had to put back the people who clustered round the gates. The Queen rode through the press with a good-natured smile. As she passed, one man, crippled and diseased, turned towards her, fixed, half-blinded eyes and muttered an incoherent curse. The Queen made the sign of the Cross, a swift and stately gesture, as if she would avert a passing evil.

Moray, Sir William Maitland, and the Earl of Morton stood at the great entrance of Holyrood as the Queen came up with the sick man in the litter.

Moray lived in a house that adjoined the palace gardens. He had been there with his two advisers when he had heard that the Queen, in broad daylight, was bringing Lennox's son to her residence and he had come at once to intercept and to challenge her folly. He stood rigid, erect in his shabby black clothes with the brilliant Jewel of the Thistle rising a little on his broad breast, his underlip dragged down, eyes almost invisible between the puffy lids, the black, worn bonnet twisted in his hands.

Maitland, elegant, fastidiously attired, bare-headed, stood beside him with an air that was at once humble and composed, watchful and alert. He had had little business to do lately for the Queen, who deliberately set him aside, using instead the services of David Rizzio, who now had nearly all her correspondence in his hands.

Sir William Maitland bowed to the Queen. He admired her very much, for her gallantry, her kindly air, the warmth of her smile, for her courage in thus proclaiming before the whole of Edinburgh her reckless passion and her rash intentions.

He looked at Mary Fleming, whom he was to marry in a few days, she had said that they would not marry until the Queen did so. No doubt that had all been arranged, for Mary Fleming had made no difficulty about her own wedding. He looked at her wondering what fate he was like to bring her in the future.

He had had so little business to do of late that there had been more time to devote to her and he had got to know her better. Her great attraction for him lay in the fact that she was something like the Queen. Having lived with her for so long she had caught a little of her gestures, her intonation. She spoke French with the same pretty accent, did her hair in the same fashion. She read the same books, sang the same songs, had the same choice in colours and embroidery. For these things Sir William Maitland was glad to marry Mary Fleming.

Behind him stood the Earl of Morton, who looked like a stout tradesman. He had red common features, a rough-cut scarlet beard, straggling, patchy hair. His attire was in the most exaggerated style of that puritanical simplicity affected by the followers of John Knox—black coat, breeches and hose, the high-crowned hat, white linen band and cuffs, soiled and crumpled. The man's eyes shone with a powerful intelligence. In his manners, in his conversation, in his private life, he was lewd. There was no crime of which he had not been accused, there was no treachery of which he was not capable, yet he was one of the godly, and the Protestants followed him anywhere.

The Queen detested the man, and she shot him a cold glance as she dismounted and came slowly up the shallow steps. She wondered how Moray and Maitland could endure such a detestable creature in their close counsel.

She did not salute her half-brother, or ask him into the palace, but stepped aside and appeared to be engrossed in the carrying of the sick man. She gave directions to the bearers and the physicians, and the litter was slowly and with difficulty borne up the steps and through the wide open door. She smiled at the four Maries and the French women and Lennox, and went into the shadows of Holyrood House. Then she smiled again directly at the two young Italians who, neat, graceful, with bent heads but shooting insolent glances of triumph out of their eyes at Moray and his advisers, followed her into the palace.

There the Queen pulled off one of her gauntlets and put her bare hand on her half-brother's sleeve and laughed.

"Why do you wait for me here and with such a scowl? How sad and despondent you look, sweet James! And Sir William! You must not overcast your nuptials with such downcast looks. Go within and talk to Mary Fleming."

"I have had over much time of late, madame," replied the Secretary, "to talk to Mary Fleming. You have relieved me of so many duties that my leisure has been too long."

He smiled as he spoke and there was no malice in his words, only, the Queen thought, rather a compassion and a gentle warning.

She raised her brows and sighed. How little they understood, all three of them, that she had determined to go on and meet her destiny heedless of either prudence or fear.

"Madame," whispered Moray, "this goes too far. How will you undo what you have done to-day in bringing Lennox's son before all Edinburgh to your palace?"

"Ay, to my palace and to my chambers," replied the Queen smoothly. "He will lie next to me--there is but a corridor between--and I shall nurse him. He is my choice, James. Tell the council so, get their consent. Ay, and I would have yours, brother." She used this last word with pointed meaning.

Morton opened his mouth showing his decaying teeth; his eyes glittered from one to the other of the two men. "Your Majesty's Grace means to marry Henry Stewart?"

"Oh, fie, sir!" said the Queen, "that is no tone in which to question a gentlewoman of so tender an affair." She turned into the palace entrance as unconcerned as if they had been talking of trivial matters, and Moray followed her into the darkness of the porch.

"If you make this marriage--" he began.

She turned on him with a swiftness which reminded him of the pounce of a hawk on its prey, a clean swoop in mid-air.

"Yes? If I make this marriage?" she asked.

"I'll split your kingdom for you!" he replied, goaded by her defiance. "I'll break your world into pieces about your feet."

The Queen gazed at him intensely. Then she smiled slowly, breathing in an excited fashion as if his definite defiance pleased her.

"Go and make your plans and I shall make mine," she said.

He sank on to his knees, moved by custom, prudence, and sincere

remorse into this instant expiation of his fury.

"May God forgive me, may Your Grace forgive me! What I said was treason."

"Treason that you long meditated," replied the Queen, still smiling, "and long have I known it."

She made no attempt to raise him from his knees. She did not accept his immediate and profound contrition.

"David," she called over her shoulder, and the proud Moray, as if he had been touched by a lash, sprang to his feet to see that the sly Italian with triumph in his very place, had been lurking in the shadows, unseen.

"The rat! The filthy vermin!" thought Moray, furiously, very pace [sic], had been lurking in the shadows, unseen.

The Queen smiled at David in a friendly understanding way. With humble reverence that was yet familiar, the Italian followed her into the palace, like a pampered and protected pet.

Moray turned slowly to where his two advisers waited on the steps. Life to him was stale and arid. He was an ambitious man and his entire hopes, his greatness, hung in the balance of events which he judged to be immediate. He was an avaricious man with vast estates and huge fortunes which might be snatched from him on the next throw of the dice. He was a man who loved his country after his own fashion, and his country might, in his judgment, soon be cast into tumult and ruin.

Yet it was neither his greatness nor his wealth nor his country that occupied him as he walked silently between his two friends, through

the forecourt where the Lennox men gathered in groups stared, whispered, and nudged as much as they dare at the Queen's halt the enemy of the Earl, their master.

Moray was considering a greater loss than that of any material thing--that of the Queen herself, the Queen smirched and tainted and perhaps cast down. Maitland knew his thoughts and echoed them:

"If she marries that boy she is lost to us."

His voice was more wistful than menacing, but Morton nodded.

"She is lost to herself, to Scotland, to all," he said. He glanced towards the gates where the crowd still hung about, though now and then dispersed by the men-at-arms. They were talking of the Queen, those people. They could not get the Queen out of their minds, the strange things she did, the high ways she had, her vanity and her brightness, her rich fashions which made her appear like a creature of another sphere.

They whispered of witchery and enchantments, there was not one of them who had not some queer tale to tell of warning raps at night, of hands on the shutter, a voice in the corner, the air full of devils. One who had come in from the hills had seen a troop of ghostly warriors sweep down a deserted glen; another a fairy horseman riding the waters of a lake; a third, going through the forest had stared up at a rustling to see the summer boughs pulled apart and the devil's face peering out, mumbling prophecies of woe. Satan, the prince of witches, was abroad and looking for sacrifices.

They accused the Queen of cruelty. There were those there who could remember how heretics had been burnt on the day that Mary of Guise had married King James. There were those who had heard tales of what had happened in France when she had reigned there.

Moray noted the people and their mood. He remarked, staring directly at Morton: "In anything I do I should have a large backing."

Morton said: "There is nothing to be feared."

But Maitland added: "There is no one to be feared but Bothwell and Huntly."

"She does not," answered Moray, very bitterly, "forgive me that. She would have liked Bothwell recalled, I think I can guess why. To cast him in my face, perhaps, if she needs another protector besides that boy. Bothwell did not come to answer his challenge, and I—" Moray gave one of his rare laughs which transformed his features into a slightly ferocious expression and gave his countenance a wolf-like cast.

Maitland smiled also, for he knew that Bothwell had not come to Edinburgh because Moray had got together six thousand men to meet him. Moray checked his laugh instantly and put his finger on his lips.

"We know where we are, and in a little while we shall know how to act. We might very well sit aside and take our ease and rest in quietness. We busybodies waste our time. What impels us to go on to make a rope of sand?"

The Queen sat by Henry Stewart's bed. The physicians had done all they could for him with their curious devices; there was nothing but to let the ebb and flow of the fever take its course.

In uncertainty and distress, Lennox waited in the outer chamber. He had had sour news from England—his wife, Margaret Lennox, of Tudor blood, had been thrown into prison by Elizabeth because her husband and son had refused to return from Edinburgh. Lennox felt

that he had lost the favour of the Queen of England, which might be worth a great deal more to him than the favour of the Queen of Scots, yet he believed he had her securely when he had used his son's key and entered her private apartment and found her waiting for a lover. Surely she would not dare defy him after that, for he knew too much.

When he had challenged her to her face with the marriage at Stirling she had not denied it. When he had told her that for her own reputation and safety she had better have a public marriage she had not denied that either.

With her gallant, gay, and good-humoured air she had come down to his house and fetched his son away and installed him at Holyrood as if he were the King: but still Lennox was not satisfied. The woman was so difficult to reach, so much of what she did was incredible. Then he greatly disliked, distrusted and feared the young Italian who seemed ever at her elbow with his excuses of letters or lutes or books and his whispered advice.

Lennox knew that he had no friends in Scotland but his own men, that the feeling against him was gathering daily, stirred up by his great enemy, Moray, and that man's two advisers, Morton and Maitland. Most of the other Lords were against him too, treating him as a Papist and a pretender to the Crown. His money was nearly all spent, and what had he to rely on except this boy, who had fallen sick on his hands?

He did not believe in the Queen's serenity. He thought she must, perforce, appear much easier than she was, and in this he was right.

The Queen was true to her long training, begun when she was a child and had first stepped into France, and she was true to her courage, which she had inherited from many kings and from the fearless House of Guise. But in her mind and soul she was much troubled, as

she sat by the side of the pale youth, and her thoughts were uneasy.

She had another reason than compassion for nursing him herself. She did not know what secrets of hers he might, unwary, mutter in his delirium; already she had learnt from his mumbled words, now whispered into his pillow, now half-shouted as he started up in his bed, the reason of his disorder.

One night, when he had come up the secret way through the tower to her apartments, the way that she had shown him, to the door to which she had given him the key, he had found it bolted and heard Mary Seaton's voice telling him once more that the Queen would not see him, that the Queen was weary and slept. Then he had gone away, not even caring to find his usual companions, Antony Standens, nor seeking his chamber-page, John Taylor, but going right away by himself down to a tavern in the Canongate, and there he had drank and drank of any wine or spirit they could give him. Finally, when the reckoning came, he found he had no money in his pocket, and had left behind him his cloak in payment.

After that, with his brain on fire and his blood overheated, with all his mind and senses a whirl of wretchedness and desire, he had turned back to Holyrood once more, swearing that this time she must let him in. But when he had reached the garden his strength had all gone and he had fallen down under one of the trees that grew by the ruined part of the great church which had been stripped and half destroyed in the last invasion of the English. And there he had lain through a long cloudy night with the rain beating on his thin silk clothes, without cloak or hat, weeping and cursing until, when the dawn came, he was light-headed and half delirious and had only the sense left to drag himself back to his father's lodgings.

The Queen watched him and struggled with her own feelings. Would she be relieved or sorry if he died from this fit of fever? If he were

dead he would be gone, like a song that has been sung, a poem that has been read, a flower that has been plucked, like a rainbow on a summer day.

She mused over that. Never had she had such a strong fancy for any man, but this was so pitiful and transient that it seemed only to exist when he actually held her in his arms, caressed her, and pressed his lips to her neck, or gazed down into her eyes or muttered in clumsy fashion rash endearments.

Yes, in those moments, he had meant much to her. She had felt exalted and enthusiastic, ready to set him up as her hero and champion and to dare the world by his side. But now, as he lay mumbling in the fever, she thought of all the cares and troubles involved in this intimacy and she almost wished that he might, without further pain or bother, die and leave her free.

Poor youth! She slowly waved to and fro a fan of white feathers to keep the air stirring round his hot forehead. She glanced approvingly at his great length in the bed, at the width of his shoulders, at the grace, even in this distress, of his movements, at the tarnished beauty of his features and hands. In his armour, now, on a great war-nor horse, would he not make a figure to fright the sour Scots?

She laughed, and though the sound was very gentle it seemed to rouse him. He sat up suddenly, his shirt falling open on his bare chest that glistened with sweat. She looked at him curiously, waiting for him to speak, then she saw that he did not know she was there.

"I cannot write French," he said rapidly, "they never taught me that. I do not know how to compose a letter--only a few words, you understand, not a letter like that. I tell you I should not dare; this is not a common girl but a great princess. Not that way, that is to my own room. There was a filthy old witch made me an ugly prophecy--" he

began to fumble at his bare throat. "Deliver us from evil," he whispered, "deliver us from evil, from violent fairies and strutting apes, from cankers that need harsh plasters."

The Queen leant between the curtains of the bed.

"Henry," she whispered in an insinuating tone, "look! look at me. I am here, waiting on you. You are in the palace, you are in my apartment!"

He stared at her and a slow look of comprehension came into his eyes. He sighed, and fell back on the pillows and she leant over him, pursuing a fragment of truth.

"Tell me--you did not write that French letter at Stirling?"

He shook his head stupidly.

"Who brought you there that night?"

His eyes, hot and confused stared at her with a pathetic sullenness, with the look of a child caught in wrongdoing and unrepentant.

"Do you understand me, Henry? Who was it?"

But he would not answer, yet as she breathed "The Italian!" he closed his eyes and she was answered. He had come to her, then, not on a surge of passion, but because he was slightly drunk and a pimp had been there to guide his steps.

She stood silent, holding the edges of the curtains. She had had him placed for her own whim satisfying she knew not what delicate sense of mockery, in her great bed trimmed with gold and silver and lined with crimson watered silk, that had been set up in her bed-chamber in Stirling. He began to shiver, and she pulled over him the coverlet

on which were designed the lions and thistles of Scotland. "Oh, well," she said, "oh, well!"

He opened his eyes slowly and with difficulty, for his lids were heavy, and looked at her with a suspicious discontent. In her glittering, elaborate gown she stood between the rift in the curtains; behind her he could see the room bright with summer sunshine and gleaming furniture.

He sat up suddenly, his delusions vanishing, and snatched at her hand.

"When will you marry me?" he asked. "Publicly! You will not leave me again, you will not play with me again?"

"You are disabled by sickness," she soothed him. "When you are well, only, be quiet, do not talk any more."

She took him unawares with her tenderness; his apprehensive defiance died away. He drew her hand under his hot cheek and slept, the clothes all awry about him, like the coverings of a child who tosses in dreams.

The Queen, after a little while, pulled her hand away, passed into her privy closet and sent one of the French girls for David Rizzio.

The Queen closed the book she had been reading to compose her thoughts. She liked to read ancient tales as well as of the intricacies of modern love. She was at home with the actions of the Immortals and with the petty spites and furies of common folk. Lampoons, ballads, pamphlets, lay on her desk. With eyes unflinching, with smooth smile undisturbed, she had read the lewd and violent abuse circulated secretly about her among her people, which Moray's agents gathered for her and diligently sent for her inspection. She

knew her half-brother's reason in this service--he wished to undermine her confidence, to shake her self-reliance and cause her to put herself more completely into his hands.

When David Rizzio entered she set her handsome books on top of the ballads coarsely printed on cheap paper.

Urbane and smooth, with his air of tender solicitude and deep reverence, the young Italian entered the room. He now spent many hours of the week alone with the Queen and was quite dizzy with his good fortune. He could scarcely believe that such marvellous luck had happened to him who had come to Edinburgh so poor, almost without shoes to his feet or clothes to his back. Sometimes in the night he would wake Giuseppe just to engage him in conversation about the extraordinary chance that had occurred to them, about the great opportunities before them. The two youths would lie in the dark and whisper excitedly about their golden prospects. The Queen quite understood his amazement, and it amused her--she was a little astonished herself at the rapid rise of this new favourite. She could understand the scandal and comments it had caused though she was indifferent as to that. They had isolated her; they had made her send back most of the French people whom she had brought with her from Paris. They had done all they could to thwart her, to frustrate her desires, even to humiliate and to circumscribe her liberty: she had to find a friend and adviser where she could.

The Italian was so pliant, so easy, understood her without the least difficulty. He had just the knowledge, the adroitness that she required and he served her with exactly that reverent, exaggerated homage to which she had been used in everyone who came near her in the Court of France. Not one among the Scots gentlemen, not one, had touched that delicate note, the relation between a queen and her subject to which this Queen had been bred. It was a mingling of a profound homage that set her apart as a goddess to be adored, and

a familiarity that recognized her as a woman to be loved.

She set her elbow on the bureau, put her chin in her hand and laughed. Her situation was difficult, perhaps, almost desperate, but nothing could quench her zest in life.

"David," she said, "I am pledged to marry Henry Stewart. His father presses me. Tell me what you think of that business."

The Italian replied very low in his pleasing voice and in his own language, with which she was fairly familiar.

"The Queen must have everything she wishes, the Queen must do as she wants."

"Ah, yes, that's delicious to hear, but I fear it is as brittle as a compliment out of a poem, but at least, the Queen will be the Queen. Tell me, you have watched, you have listened. What do you think of this marriage?"

The Italian closed his eyes for a second and drew a deep breath to steady himself--it seemed to him so incredible that he of all the men in the great city should be here closeted with the Queen and giving her advice. He replied, steadily, in French:

"I cannot see what can suit the Queen's gracious plans better than the marriage with the Lord Darnley. He is a member of the true Faith and as such will be acceptable to the Pope. A marriage with a Roman Catholic would encourage Your Majesty's co-religionists in England, in Scotland, and on the Continent. It would be as a rallying-point for a strong movement to throw off these damned heretics who have dug their claws so firmly into Your Majesty's fair lands. If Your Majesty married to please the Queen of England it would be to a heretic and you would, on that count, get no help from His Holiness

nor Their Majesties of France or Spain.

"If you marry a foreign prince there will be great difficulties and also delays. This gentleman is a prince, a near pretender to the throne. By marrying him you end that claim and that of his father. Besides," added the Italian, suavely, yet with a short sigh, "he is young and very splendid, he is noticed everywhere he goes and he would appear magnificent as a king."

"For beauty," replied the Queen carelessly, "I have never seen one like him. But he is morose and sullen, violent and insolent, and his manners are detestable."

David Rizzio put back the sweep of bronze-coloured hair with a nervous hand.

"He is a boy, and, madame, you can make of him what you will. You torment him until he becomes half-crazed, but if you were to soothe him--bears will eat out of a fair hand that holds sugar, madame."

He looked at the Queen gravely as he stood before her, with even more than his wonted reverence.

"Besides," he added, very softly and respectfully, "there is really nothing else that Your Majesty can do." The Queen did not reply, and the Italian continued: "After his sickness, when his father found the key in his pocket--it does not matter how discreet one is, things get about. If Your Majesty were to marry him publicly nothing could be said."

"All has been said," replied the Queen, directly. "That he is the lover, I am the wanton, you are the go-between, only they use coarser terms than that, I think, David. Never mind, it is perhaps foolish to have an open scandal. Besides," she added, with an impetuous

change of manner, "I love him. Do I not love him, David?"

The Italian bowed low, so low that she could not see his face.

"Your Majesty knows."

With a quizzical and loving smile the Queen stared down at him and noticed the little pin with the white topaz head in his collar that Mary Seaton had put into the bandage on his arm the day that he had caught Florestan from the altar.

"I have told my brother and I have told the council," she said. "The marriage will go through."

"And shall I remain Your Majesty's secretary?"

There was a note of appeal in his low voice. She was flattered to think how much a goddess she was to this graceful, clever youth. He had nothing beyond her favour, nothing; he was literally her creature whom she had raised from obscurity to a shining brightness.

"Your place is safe, David."

At that his happiness made him radiant and with a grace that seemed to bridge the difference between them and yet with a humility that seemed to remember it, he offered her a gift.

It was a tortoise composed of small clusters of rubies with head and neck worked in gold. He told her that it had belonged to his mother and that he had always kept it even through his neediest years. He begged her, his gracious Queen, who had given him so many noble gifts, to accept this from him, the most unworthy of her servants.

The Queen liked the trifle and liked the manner of the giving. It did not either displease her that he had once been of sufficient rank to wear

such jewels. She liked to think that his origin was mysterious, perhaps grand. Maybe he was some princely bastard of as good blood as Moray.

She gave him her hand to kiss while she fondled the tortoise between the fingers he pressed to his lips.

He had lied about the gem; he had obtained it from a Lombard money-lender and money-changer in the Nether-bow, the man to whom he had pledged the Queen's white topaz which he had since redeemed and now wore as if he had never parted with it. It had taken him almost all the money that he was able to spare from the Queen's generosity, to purchase the jewel. And that had been only on account. The merchant had allowed him to have an ornament of such considerable value because it was well known that he was so high in the Queen's favour and would soon be able to pay the complete value of the gift.

She allowed him to kiss her fingers and her wrist, and he became quite intoxicated, and feeling the impossibility of any longer keeping his head, he left her abruptly with an emotion that did not displease the Queen. As he left she said lightly, "So it was you who planned it at Stirling? I might have known that he was too stupid."

The Scotch Council debated with hostile gravity the question of the Lennox marriage. The English Council passed a resolution declaring such an alliance contrary to English interests. Elizabeth sent Sir Nicholas Throckmorton to Edinburgh to warn the Queen not to make this marriage. Moray refused his formal consent. But, when Henry Stewart recovered from his fever, he and the Queen were wedded in Holyrood Chapel with full Roman Catholic rites.

The Queen came to her wedding in a full suit of mourning, hood and cloak and gown. She was serene and a little distracted as if for the

second time she gave away her hand and her crown with a certain indifference. She entered the chapel between Lennox, alert, anxious, scarcely daring to be triumphant, and Atholl. Her household, such as were Roman Catholics, followed.

The bridegroom, it was noted, seemed greatly troubled. He had been early in the chapel and prayed much at the altar before the coming of the Queen, and, what was strange for one who had been so eager to show splendour, he was plainly dressed in a dark satin without jewels.

But when he saw the Queen, he came forward as if about to talk to her, eagerly, as if he had something on his mind to declare to her before them all at this solemn moment. His father twitched him by the sleeve and gave him a look that reminded him of the formalities of the occasion. And at that he went quietly back to his place in front of the altar and knelt with the Queen on the stiff, embroidered cushions, and when the moment came wedded her with three rings, one of which was a circlet of gold with a motto inside and out, another was a rich diamond, and the third the red ring he had taken from her breast that night at Stirling Castle when David Rizzio had brought him to her door.

When the ceremony was over, those who stood about the Queen were permitted to take out the pins of her mourning attire so that the veils of black lawn crepe which Mary Beaton and Mary Seaton had carefully pinned up into the likeness of a gown, fell on the chapel floor, a sable cloud, and the Queen stepped out in a robe of glittering silk the colour of blue ice, with all her French diamonds laid about her breast and shoulders.

"I hope," she said, "I may never have to wear that sad raiment again."

She looked at her husband graciously, but his answering glance was questioning and troubled.

Who had attended these nuptials to which all had been summoned?

Moray was not there, nor Maitland, nor Morton, nor any of their hangers-on, and not many other great Scottish names. Only a few, and those Lennox men.

As they came into the ante-chamber, someone cried, "God save the King!" but there was only one cap raised and only one answering shout. The gesture and the voice came from old Lennox who, in embarrassed defiance, echoed: "God save His Majesty!"

The banquet to which so few had come and which had been so dull was over. The bride and groom were in the apartments of the Queen.

When she had first come to Scotland she had chosen for her own rooms those in the tower built by her grandfather and completed by her father. She had assigned the lower floor in this handsome quarter to her husband, keeping only the upper portion for herself, and he was as splendidly housed as the Queen with audience chamber, bedrooms, closets in the turret, and a private oratory. The staircase with which he was already familiar, for it had been his means of private access to the Queen, led from the garden to his apartments and by the newel stair in the wall from his chambers to her apartment.

There had been nothing niggardly in the manner with which the Queen had prepared for the reception of the husband who brought her nothing. Italian tapestries of playing boys and sporting animals, a dais, embroidered velvet chairs of state, pictures, vessels of crystal and agate, mirrors and painted coffer, lavishly furnished the chamber to which Mary carelessly gave him the key in a casket of

silver filigree.

She had appointed for him a retinue as large as her own--secretaries, pages, gentlemen, ushers, an escort of armed soldiers. She named him King, promised him the Crown Matrimonial, said his name should come first in all writings. And to this lavishness she added a further generosity--suits of blued Greenwich armour, suits of damascened Genoa armour, daggers, swords, robes of velvet and sable, horses, some English hawks and hounds.

"What can I give you in return, madame?"

His demeanour did not seem like that of one who had gained a throne and a queen.

"You must be my husband."

"Nay, I have been that for several weeks now, and little comfort has it brought either of us."

"But you are my husband now before everyone."

She put her arm through his and drew him into the audience chamber into which the newel stairway from his room ascended.

This was a very bright and pleasant apartment. On the ceiling under which they walked were the new decorations set up on the occasion of her first marriage where all the insignia of the Houses of Lorraine and Valois, the alerions and the lilies, the dolphins and the royal initials were cunningly interlaced on lozenges with the Royal Arms of Scotland.

The room was furnished with great luxury; though the country might be poor the Queen was rich enough to indulge personal splendour. Her jointure as Dowager-Queen of France sufficed to keep her with

a brilliance that had no parallel in Scotland.

"Yes, you are my husband now," she exclaimed with a proud and excited air, "and you must help me."

"To what?" he asked apprehensively. He had neither the mind nor the capacity for this position; he did not want to be the master of this brilliant, brittle creature whom he so distrusted. Ambition, wounded pride, his father's goading, had urged him on to become the husband of this enchanting and perilous Queen, and now he stood abashed, feeling buffeted by the dark wings of chance.

She paused before the oratory, her private praying place. Setting the door wide she stared in at the painted alabaster altar and white alabaster steps, the holy winged pictures, the gilt rails and the candles. Tears came to her eyes, brought there by childhood memories, by nostalgia and loneliness. She turned and clung with a passion he could not read to the tall youth.

"We must triumph. Don't you see, my brother and his friends, Morton, Maitland, Knox, and all the Calvinists--we must set them down, you and I."

She laughed, coaxing and caressing him, took his arm again and paced with him the length of the regal audience chamber.

"I have never been a queen yet, and you must make me one now."

"I've no head for policies or intrigue, Mary. I hardly understand what any of these people would be at. It is true that your brother is puffed up and greedy, but would it not be better to let him rule--"

She interrupted swiftly.

"Do you think that he will wish to continue to rule while you are there?"

No! You have lost me my brother, Harry, and you must take his place. The place of all of them! Do you hear, do you understand?"

Her swift eagerness baffled him.

"If you make me King," he replied slowly, "I suppose I shall know what to do with that title."

"If there is any trouble, any resistance, if they stir up revolts we will arm and chase them from place to place until we have run them out of the kingdom."

Such violent and resolute ideas confused him. He frowned, looking at her steadily, trying to understand her, wondering why she had chosen him and in what lay her transient enchantment for him. There were hours, even days, when he would not think of her at all, and there were moments when he wished he had not met her.

She was a paragon and his wife; he tried to solace himself with these thoughts. His wife--the Queen--and he the King, the master of all that snarling troop of Puritans. She set him over Moray! He flushed, half-ashamed, half-pleased at this pre-eminence.

She led him to the dais at the end of the room which was now in the shadows of the gathering twilight, and the gold of the crown on the seat showed clearly. She set him there in the great chair with arms, persuading him into it with kisses, and when he was settled, half-reluctant, half-smiling in that high place, she stepped back and stared at him as so many had stared at her seated there in elegant royalty.

Outwardly her choice did not disappoint her, for the man was splendid. Whom else could she have chosen in all Europe who would have so gallantly filled a throne? For physique and grace there could

be none who was his equal. Her passion for him and the dreams that passion inspired, revived, as she sat on the steps of the throne, looking up at him.

She was the Queen and had created a King. Together they would rule. Would he be difficult, grow restive, would she find him tiresome to manage? These little doubts pricked at her exalted mood. Already she, who knew the temper of her people better than he could, or else had a sharper understanding, had to warn him of his sudden bursts of rage against his inferiors, his curtness and insolence to his equals, all rising from his untrained youth and his wretched uncertainty as to his position together with his consciousness that he had not one true friend in Scotland.

She thought to tell him of this now, but looking up and seeing him there enthroned on the dais with the lions and the Cross of St. Andrew and all the imposing insignia of her splendours about him, and seeing him staring down at her with love in his eyes, she only saw again that lover of the night at Stirling and could not broach serious matters.

She let him take her up, which he did eagerly, and place her on the throne beside him—there was room enough for two. She slipped her arms round his neck and had a sense of gathering to her all his strength and courage, so that she felt impregnable against the world. Beauty is a dower of itself, she thought; he is like a god, splendour of purple, gold, diamond...

The summer twilight took on a soft golden quality making strange and unfamiliar to her eyes the shapes of the room. Through the open door she saw the small oratory, glittering in the light of the holy red lamp. She thought of the large Abbey church ruined, stripped, and profaned near the burial-place of her forefathers and she resolved that soon she and her new lord would rebuild it and furnish in great

splendour.

"Shall we not be happy?" she whispered, defiantly. "Say we shall be happy."

But he did not give her the reassurances she confidently expected, and what he did say was quite astonishing to her.

"You should see less now of the Italian. He becomes very pert and everybody detests him."

Her spontaneous laughter sounded in the room. Did he not know that this was exactly what was said of him?

"You found David useful once," she reminded him, with her head on his breast.

He frowned, not caring to hear that. Deep in his heart he held uneasily and sincerely the opinion of her expressed by the common people in the streets--scorn for her easy, shameless lightness. Although it had been a rich and splendid experience to possess her he never thought of those stolen delights without hearing in his ears the sneers of the gutter-urchins behind her coach, the shrill mockery of housewives standing arms akimbo in their doorways, the stolid looks of Puritans who saw her go by and made no mark of respect. But she, even now when she was his wife sitting on the throne with him with her arms round his neck, must remind him of Stirling and David the go-between. He said with sullen force:

"Send the scoundrel back to Italy. Stuff his pockets with gold and send him away."

"Because we do not need him now?" she smiled. "Is this your gratitude? And why is he 'scoundrel'? It was you who first promoted him and now he has served his term--"

"Let him go, I say."

She began to kiss him passionately.

"Ah, let him go to-night, at least. Is not the world shut out, all the doors are locked, there is no one here, not even Mary Seaton!" She pressed close on him. "To-night you do not need to stand cold on a secret stair against a bolted door, my love."

The Queen woke: her bridal night was over. She had not drawn the curtains last night because she liked the moonbeams in the room and now the sun shone in clearly, She looked at the man sleeping heavily beside her, and she sighed, thinking of all the days to come.

She pulled the curtains from the bed and stared at him keenly, wondering if he would serve her purpose, if she would weary of him. She had never expected to be happy with any man, but she might find one who would know the game she played and appreciate her and give her a fair deal, who could be gay and good-humoured over it all.

She passed her fine hand curiously over his beautiful fair hair on the pillow, she marked his light lashes like a line of gilding on his flushed face, the down on his unshaven lip and cheeks. How young he was, only a boy! But powerful as a lion, strong as a giant and quite fearless, she believed.

Could she set this golden Colossus up, striding over Scotland, his feet on the necks of her vassals? Perhaps she might, with the help of David Rizzio. She smiled to herself as she recalled her lord, huge and elegant, on the dais last night, and her smile deepened as she recalled the hours that had followed. He loved her. He loved her. She would be able to do what she would with him.

It was still very early when the Queen went warily from her room where her husband lay asleep. She dressed and went into the audience chamber where the empty throne stood under the ceiling painted with the insignia of three noble Houses and the initials of her dead husband and his father.

She went into the little oratory where it was cold and solitary and the red lamp still burned above the painted alabaster. And there she knelt on the cold white stone and became absorbed in a sense of security and Divine guidance, while outside the city woke to angry comments on the Queen, on her rash and foolish behaviour, on her sudden and reckless marriage.

* * *

PART 2 - The Violet-Brown Bed

"You have heard what the Devil can do of himself: now you shall hear what he can perform by his instruments, who are many times worse (if it be possible) than he himself, and, to satisfy their revenge and lust, cause more mischief."

—Democratus Junior.

2. The Violet-Brown Bed

There were hurried, furtive movements in the capital whist gradually spread all over Scotland so that the whole land and even the islands seemed alert with fear and suspicion.

The Queen was married, and to a boy who was unpopular with everyone. She had a foreign favourite who had been a groom. Every lord gathered round him his clansmen and armed, restless and impatient in holds and castles, cities and villages—waiting. All looked to Lord Moray, who had ruled them to their liking, to give a signal, but he, enclosed in his Edinburgh house, made no sign.

The Queen's half-brother had suffered so much from the Queen's marriage that it seemed to him as if he had been through a long and exhausting illness that had left him enfeebled. He had been so absorbed by his own thoughts and anguish that he had hardly heard, although he had appeared to listen, the advice of his followers and counsellors. He had scarcely noticed that Maitland had said nothing but smiled and had gone his way with his young wife, who was a little like the Queen.

They were both of them retired from affairs. The Queen never sent for them nor wrote to them, and though they still nominally held their offices they had become nonentities where once they had been all-

powerful. Like a delicate destruction, fear of the idolatrous Queen lay on the land.

Lord Moray went to Holyrood and begged an audience of the Queen's husband. He was received at once in the King's audience chamber which was directly beneath that of the Queen in the Tower of James N. Moray thought at one time that he would have never come to this, asking what seemed a favour, offering what seemed friendship to one so despised and detested. But his inner resolution had overcome this squeamishness and it was quite serenely that he faced the young man who had completely reversed his policies, overthrown his power, and taken from him the dearest thing he had under Heaven. He even looked at him with a certain compassion, for he saw with that clarity that suffering sometimes gives to perception, that the boy was not happy.

Moray always spoke little and chose his words well, and he came directly to the matter of his visit, which he could see had astonished the King.

"I, sir, thinking well of our circumstances and of the state of this kingdom, have come to offer you a pact. Will you, since you are master, allow me to serve Scotland in my old way?"

The King was not immediately equal to this calculated candour. He could neither grasp the spirit nor thoroughly understand the words of this offer. He stammered and glanced uneasily from side to side. Moray proceeded slowly, precisely, to explain himself.

Would he, King Henry, accept his, Lord Moray's services? Would he deal with him in a spirit of frankness and loyalty, accepting a certain amount of toleration for the Papists, but keeping the English Alliance and the supremacy of the Puritans? Would he be guided by the experience, the knowledge of the older man, would he retain the

services of Maitland and Morton, two men so different and each in his way, perhaps, unacceptable to the King, but indispensable to Scotland?

Moray said Scotland again and again, but when he used that word he meant the Queen.

Henry Stewart listened, at last understood, and had an impulse of gratitude and desire to accept. He was very glad to be King, but he had no desire for the burdens of government. Nothing would induce him to go to the councils or interest himself in political affairs, and he reflected that if he could get some one like Moray to do all these matters for him and leave him the credit it would be just as well. But he checked these impulses. He reminded himself that he must not trust anyone; least of all must he trust Moray, who had always been his enemy and no doubt now hated him keenly.

Then, Moray was a heretic, and he had pledged himself to the Queen to support her in restoring the Roman Catholics, and he was known to be a friend, perhaps on the payroll, of the English Queen and Henry was pledged against England. With his naturally candid mind poisoned by these reflections, he stood sullenly, his hands thrust on the hip of his doublet, and stared at the ground, so that Moray's anger rose at the ungraciousness of one whom he had condescended to flatter.

"Sir, I am obliged to you," said Henry Stewart at last, in that slurred voice and with that English accent that the Scots had found so exasperating, "but it seems to me if I am a king I must rule for myself."

Nothing could have been more absurd than these ill-chosen words. Moray gave his ugly smile; the young King saw it and flushed miserably.

"I am led by none," he cried; "I am master of my house, I suppose? I need no counsellors nor advisers!" Encouraging himself with bold words, for the older man secretly overawed him, he bragged: "Your discontents are well known, Lord Moray. Look to it that they do not border on treason."

"Treason to whom?" asked Moray softly. "There is no man whom I acknowledge as King."

"I speak for the Queen--she will not be ruled."

"By any save yourself, I suppose, sir," added Moray suavely. "Well, I see how matters stand. I thought we might come to some understanding. Before God," he added with a fervency that caused the youth to start, "I had but one desire in my mind when I came here and that was to save the Queen."

"To save the Queen? From what?"

"Perhaps you know," said Moray, moving towards the door. "Indeed, sir, it is hardly a matter that you or I can put into words. If you had accepted of my friendship and I had stayed, I might have done it."

"If you had stayed, Lord Moray? Do you mean to leave Edinburgh?"

"I can scarcely hang at your doors to be discarded like a lackey whose term of service is past," said Moray smiling with the easiness of one too great to take offence. "Sir, you will not take my advice and yet you will find that none other will counsel you so surely."

Bewildered, distracted, changing from this emotion to that from hour to hour, the unhappy young man exclaimed:

"Tell me, Lord Moray, tell me what I am to do, for indeed I often do

not know myself!

Moray looked away so that the other might not be embarrassed by this confession of weakness.

"What can I tell you, sir? You must take me in all or in nothing. I'll tell you this--look out for the Italian. You call yourself the King, at least you are the Queen's husband--if you have any manhood left remove the Italian."

Henry Stewart turned away peevishly and stood rigid against the wall, his face bent against the tapestry of unicorns and playing boys which his weight dragged tight above his bright hair; his broad shoulders heaved slightly, there was something uncouth in his shape, distorted by the fashionable padded garments. Gazing at this unspeakable misery, Moray felt healed. His own sickening jealousy which afflicted him with physical nausea disappeared. "So that's it! I can meddle with him no more."

The King's bastard took his leave and softly descended the newel stairway that he had often run up in his father's time when he was a child with lesson books under his arm. He walked across the park where all the trees were yellow, and he thought of the hare that he had seen there, peering through the mist. How inexplicable was the evil in one who seemed the quintessence of beauty!

In his house Morton was awaiting him, sitting stiffly, his podgy hands on his black-clad knees, his worn doublet split at the seams, unbuttoned over his bulging stomach because of the heat.

Moray looked at the man keenly. He found comfort in knowing that such instruments were ready to his hand.

"There is nothing to be done with the boy, nothing. He'll help you to

get rid of the Italian--that must be done quite soon, unless--"

Morton nodded, and sniggered one word with relish: "Cuckold, eh?"

"Oh, she must go!" cried Moray impetuously, "she must go!"

That evening the Queen learned that her brother and many of his followers had left Edinburgh. She summoned them to return immediately or to hold themselves as rebels.

She sent for Sir William Maitland and commanded him to come to her in the Exchequer House where she was casting up her accounts which she did every year at this time with her secretary. "For she had a mind," she said in her message, "to open her heart to him," and on a beautiful purple summer evening Sir William waited on the Queen. He had long been estranged from the court.

The fading day had the sweetness of high summer, the parlour in the summer-house was drenched with sunshine. The Queen sat in the window and watched the golden leaves that half hid the sky making a shifting pattern as the hot breeze fanned them to and fro.

She was alone but for Florestan, the monkey, asleep on the borders of her skirt, but through a half-open door she could see her secretaries at work--the two Italians and the Frenchman who had been in the service of her uncle, the Cardinal, busy with their books and ledgers.

As soon as Sir William Maitland had entered the Queen's presence his strained glance took in that distant scene and he smiled good-humouredly. He was still the Queen's Secretary of State, though since her marriage he had had little work to do.

Why had she sent for him? He was pleased but not flattered at the summons.

The Secretary, perhaps among all the men who had something to do with the Queen, knew exactly how she regarded him. He could almost be sure what she was going to say--no doubt she wished to sound him as to the intentions of Moray, Morton, and himself. She considered herself very adroit and subtle in these matters and it pleased him to watch her spread her wiles, like it pleased him to watch a peacock spread his tail. That her caprice or fancy might ruin him, already had, perhaps, ruined him, did not greatly affect him. His whole life was in intellectual activity, he played the game for the sake of the game purely, he cared little for the stakes.

The Queen looked at him as he came in and made his reverence and then, as he returned her gaze, her eyes shifted; they were never steady for long.

"Are you come to scold me?" she asked.

At which the Secretary replied simply that he had come because he had been sent for, and waited for her to speak. "Oh," replied the Queen, with an air, candid, almost timid. "We have always been open with each other, you and I, Sir William, we understood each other from the first. You were my mother's faithful servant."

Sir William smiled in silence. She knew how often he had betrayed Mary of Guise, as he swung from this side to that as his temper moved him, caring only to work out his own schemes to the end he had appointed for them.

She was silent for a moment breathing deeply as if she drank in the sunshine, but he knew that she was wondering what course to take with him. All her tricks amused him, as did the darting of his cat after a ball of silk.

She decided on a mock frankness, and said directly: "The Earl of Moray has left Edinburgh."

"Ay, madame, to raise a rebellion."

"And the Earl of Morton?" she asked.

"He is still Lord High Chancellor, madame, as I am Secretary of State."

"Do not either of you, Sir William, follow the Earl of Moray?"

"Madame, no."

"Why?"

"Need I answer that, madame, and how shall you be satisfied with any answer that I might make?"

"Knowing that you never tell the truth?"

"Knowing that there is no need for me to do so. Besides, your own wit shall give you the reply."

"It is this, then," said the Queen. "The Earl of Morton and you and many others besides who fawned on Moray when he was here, remain with me. Because you think that after all I am the Queen and that if I raise my standard, more will rally to that than will follow the Earl of Moray, who is, after all, but my bastard brother."

"That answer is as good as another," replied Sir William, indifferently. "But we remain, madame, we remain! We are in your service and you must give your orders."

He crossed the room deliberately, and shut the door that opened into

the counting-house where the two Italians worked.

"Why did Moray go?" insisted the Queen. "You are his closest friend, tell me that. I took nothing from him, I offered him no affront."

"The man is squeamish," replied Sir William, "and he does not like to see the maggots deflower the apricot; his stomach turns when he sees vermin in a lady's chamber."

She understood him at once, he saw, and seemed more interested than offended. Maitland continued to expound his theme for it always pleased him to put into words his careful, shrewd opinions of his fellow-men, the result of observation.

"Lord Moray has a mixed nature, madame. Part of him cares for gaudy things--houses and lands and money and power, the lure of common men. And part of him would throw all away rather than be brought to behold a sight which repulses him."

The Queen picked up the grey, wrinkled monkey from her skirt-hem and placed it on her lap.

"Why," she asked serenely, "should it disturb Lord Moray or you or any other gentleman that I take this industrious Italian for my servant?"

"Do you not really know, madame? The rat is quite a dainty animal with smooth fur and bright eye, very nimble in his gait, but he is bred to stench and filth, he is fed on garbage and crouches in the dungeons. When we find him in a pretty chamber we kill him."

The Queen drooped her head in her hands as she stared down at the monkey.

"I am fastidious, too," said Sir William smiling. "I do not care to sniff

at a fly-blown flower, to see the rot creep into the peach. Yet, curiosity overcomes all."

"Curiosity, sir?"

"Yes. To see what may grow out of this corruption."

The Queen sighed lightly. She seemed neither vexed nor greatly moved.

"Sir, you see things one way, and f another. Corruption! Are you to preach like old John Knox? Wien he used to come up to the palace he would shake his fist in my ladies' faces and remind them of these same noisome things--your rat, your fly, your maggot, your spoiled peach, your bruised flowers, decay and corruption to make the squeamish sick. Ay, and without any stuttering, sir, he told us plain tales of how one day the worm would pick our bones completely. He did not frighten me, Sir William." She lifted from her waist the watch in the form of a skull. "That was given me by my first husband; he died young and wretchedly, corrupting while the breath was still in him. Do you think it is easy to frighten me? I always wear this at my waist, and I too can see the blowfly and the worms beneath the flower and the leaf."

"Madame, you have mistook and purposely, I think, my allegory. Let me say directly that Lord Moray could not stand by and see the Queen's Majesty defiled by the company she keeps."

"And do you think him justified, Sir William?"

"Madame, I do."

"Then why did you not follow him?"

"As I have said--out of curiosity and to help you if can."

She continued to caress the monkey and to smile without looking up. Sir William saw that he had pleased her by this confession of loyalty. He had not troubled to be subtle with her, he had spoken the truth when he had stated his motives. He was inquisitive as to what would befall this strange, bold, foolish woman and he did wish to help her although he had long ago, in silence, given up his once strong hope of seeing her a powerful sovereign and himself her powerful minister.

Yet, besmirched and tarnished as she might be, she was still the Queen and worth saving, if indeed she could yet be saved. He looked at her tenderly. Her complexion did not seem so clear nor her eyes so radiant nor her hair so brilliant, there was a blur over her loveliness that had always been smooth and bright like a pearl.

She sat silent, withdrawn into her own thoughts as if oblivious of his scrutiny. And the able, keen-witted man who believed he understood her began to feel that she was, after all, something of a mystery. What had she learnt in France? She might have been brought up by a fanatic prude of a grandmother, lived under the wing of an austere mother-in-law, her own mother might have been the chastest woman in the world, priests, cardinals, nuns, might have hedged her round about, but what had she learnt in France where every woman of her rank knew too much?

He saw her as fickle, inconstant, ravenous for the hearts and souls of others but without either heart or soul herself—an elegant harpy, cold, knowing nothing even of passion. Then he thought that this was a false picture. She might be without tenderness, fidelity, affection, or spirituality, but even so, why should she be thought of as worthless? Did not this rather make her a goddess? Had not she, by virtue of some divinity, enshrined in her person, a right to her whims and fancies, her cruelties? Might not all be forgiven to the woman whose look, whose touch, whose smile could start a bright dream in the

mind like a brilliant bird started from the coverts of a wood? Corrupt, depraved, a trivial, shallow creature--or a goddess beyond all their codes and traditions, their petty human reserves and denials? Sir William Maitland did not know, though he had a clear judgment and believed in nothing, and alone of all the men in Scotland was free of superstition.

The Queen glanced at him sideways and began to plead with him. Her marriage, now? She supposed everyone talked ill of that. Perhaps she had been mistaken, but she had married Henry Stewart to bring peace to the kingdom, to put a claimant to the throne out of the way.

"You know, Sir William, It has always been your desire and mine that one day my House might reign over the whole Island. Well, is this not a step towards it? If we should have a child--" She put her hand to her waist and smiled timidly. "And David. now. You are mistaken there, he is so humble and so good and not what you think. He has had a hard life, he and his poor young brother. They are only boys and I try to make amends to them for all they have suffered. They work very diligently."

She continued in her low persuasive voice, which seemed to Sir William to have no feeling in it at all, to put forward the case of the two Italians. to praise them, to excuse herself for employing them. But Sir William took no more heed than if he had been listening to the chatter of the sparrows in the hedge, and when she paused he said, looking up at the sky:

"The Queen's Grace may pity two poor foreign boys and give them charity, but she may not have them in her closet clothed in sable and purple and entrust them with her secrets. What letters does Signor David write for you, madame, that I may not see?"

"Why, only on my private matters, to my friends and relatives in France."

Sir William smiled at this childish tie. Surely she knew that he was aware that she conducted clumsy and complicated intrigues with the Roman Catholic church through the medium of the Italians. He began to weary of the purposeless conversation which seemed to him to mean no more than the buzzing of flies in the air. He no longer expected anything from her that would serve either Scotland or himself. All her little lies and beguilements to entice him to his old allegiance (for he knew that that was what she wanted of him: she was jealous of any loss of respect or affection) were to him but a waste of breath. So he said:

"I shall remain in Edinburgh and so will the Lord Morton."

At that she burst out in anger against the Lord Chancellor, detailing all his lewd habits and puritanical hypocrisy.

She rose, shaking the monkey into the window-place where she had sat, leaving it to curl up on the cushions.

"I so detest the Earl Morton that I have half a mind to put David in his place."

"Excellent and noble lady," said Sir William smiling, "all that you say of Earl Morton is very true and you may well be astonished that your brother had such an adviser and that I have such a friend. We have but one reason, madame, the man knows how to govern Scotland."

"I do not need a governor, neither does the country," replied the Queen. "I have a husband now."

Sir William did not trouble to answer these boasts. Why should he trouble himself for her and her young lord who was so detested? She

herself who might have made something of him, perhaps a worthy wearer of the crown, was herself spoiling his manliness by her tricks and her inconstancy.

Maitland pitied the wretched young King as he might have pitied the mayfly caught in the almost invisible menace of the spider's web.

"Madame, the day is hot, let us not play with words. In Edinburgh I await your pleasure."

By the emphasis he gave this last word he invested it with a double meaning so that even she was a little discomposed and began to walk up and down the sun-drenched parlour. He watched her, admiring the flow of her blue gown, the grace of her bearing, but caring no more for what she said than for the cooing of the doves in the trees, but he was pleased with the modulations in her voice, as she railed against Moray.

She knew, she cried, that he had long wished to be a traitor, that he intended to set the crown on his own head. She vowed that she would harry him out of Scotland, and declared vehemently that she knew who would help her to do this. He thought she alluded to her miserable husband or the Italian. and he did not trouble to answer.

But while she paced up and down, exhausting herself in her anger against Moray, expressing also her rage against many other things, perhaps against her own destiny, Maitland thought of a crafty trick that he might try. When the Queen paused and stood sighing again in the window-place looking up at the gold leaves against the sky, he said:

"Madame, might I speak to Signor David?"

She looked startled, for she could not understand this, but she gave

her consent out of curiosity.

"He is in the next room."

"I am to wait on him, then?" asked Sir William Maitland pleasantly. "It shall be as the Queen's Grace says."

He made her his reverence and crossed to the door that he had recently shut, opened it, and entered the presence of the Italian secretary and his assistants.

Signor David felt very proud when he saw Sir William Maitland, that great famous gentleman, approaching him with a pliant, courteous, almost suppliant air. Lately many people, some of them of considerable importance, had begun to flatter the Italian secretary, even to fawn on him, and he made a large amount of money in bribes and presents from many of those whose shoes he would have been glad to tie a few months ago; some even now pulled off their caps to him. He did not think it at all impossible that even Sir William Maitland might have come to beg him to plead with the Queen. No doubt the Secretary of State was troubled for his future now that his patron, the Earl of Moray, had fled the capital.

The Italian rose, made a slight reverence and then seated himself again, leaving Sir William standing. The servant was quite intoxicated by his success and felt very able to hold it with his own cunning and cleverness. All the letters that he sent abroad seemed to him like strong ties to keep him in his place. He was the keeper of the Queen's secrets, one who had ousted her young husband in her favour. He believed it was wise to be presumptuous, bold and pert. He stared at Sir William steadily.

Sir William looked at him casually as if he glanced over some object he might be about to purchase, say a handsome young horse or a

sporting dog.

The Italian was carefully barbered, tailored, and perfumed. Not a hair of his trim person was awry; the smooth hair in curled ends was tucked behind the left ear in which hung a pearl.

Maitland's scrutiny travelled from that costly ornament to a cross of five diamonds on the young man's breast and then to a ring of emeralds on the slender finger.

"Signor David, there are few in Scotland who care to give you good advice. You are a foreigner, a stranger here and have not many friends."

"Sir," replied the Italian, leaning back in his chair, "I do very well."

Sir William Maitland gazed at him serenely. He thought him vile, worthless and shallow, a fool. He recalled that Moray had tried to warn the foolish master, make friends with him and save him, for the Queen's sake. Now he, whose feelings were not as involved as Moray's had been, was trying to save the servant--for the Queen's sake always. He doubted if it could be done, but in what seemed a simple, a natural way, he made the attempt.

"Signor David, I have travelled much and observed men and women closely. I speak, therefore, from a long experience when I say that I have seen many a lackey lifted to his master's place and there beheld him glitter for a little while like a false marshflare, ay, even splutter and sparkle on the threshold of his lady's chamber, but always, in the conclusion, I have seen him stamped out. Underfoot, Signor David, like a spark from a torch."

The Italian listened keenly. His lean fingers played over the papers in front of him. He had been copying an inventory of the Queen's jewels,

a task that he loved. Sir William spoke so wisely, so coolly, that the Italian was impressed and alarmed. He did not answer but glanced at his brother, who was sitting tense the other side of the table listening, his bright eyes searching Sir William's impassive face.

"Leave Scotland," advised the Secretary of State. "Pack up your velvets and your furs, your brooches and your rings and begone while you can."

The Italian fondled his chin and looked away. Then he crossed himself, heaved his shoulders, and began to laugh, staring down at the diamonds on his breast to give himself confidence.

"Sir William Maitland, when the Queen bids me to do so I shall leave Scotland, and that will not be yet, I think, for I have no reason to believe that I displease her."

He smiled, showing his white, sharp teeth, and Giuseppe, the young brother, laughed and began to pull about the ledger and turn the pages, absorbed in his task as if Sir William's visit was an interruption and an annoyance.

"How absurd," remarked the Secretary lightly, "is it to see those, as common as a barber's chair, who think to gain renown by a web of little lies."

The Queen had her book between her fingers and seemed drowsy. When Sir William returned to her parlour she did not concern herself to ask him what had passed between him and the Italian. She could find that out afterwards. She nodded to him and looked down again at her great book of amorous tales.

Sir William glanced pleasantly at the clock above the table on which was the tumbled needlework.

"Your time is past, madame. Your clock has lost the hour."

The Queen flamed suddenly like a furred banner broken into the sky. She came glittering, flushed, triumphant to a meeting of the Privy Council and insisted that her brother and the Lords who had followed him, the chief of whom was Argyll, his brother-in-law, should be plainly denounced as rebels. She signed the Proclamation which charged all her subjects not to give these men meat, drink, armour, any succour or obedience. She signed another desiring all her subjects with fifteen days' provisions to meet at the great cities of the country--Edinburgh, Linlithgow, Falkirk, Glasgow, Stirling.

She appointed the Earl of Atholl Lieutenant of the North, and charged him to seek out the rebels and pursue them with fire and sword. All men between the ages of sixteen and sixty under pain of forfeiture of their goods were to support the Queen against the Earl of Moray.

It was the Queen, beautiful, animated, with an air of power and authority who made all arrangements and issued all orders. Her husband was sometimes with her but more often she was alone, with her women and the Italian secretary. Morton and Maitland remained in her service, although they had been Moray's friends.

In the warm autumn weather the Queen rode to St. Andrews with the King in splendid armour by her side, and she herself in gold and scarlet with a seal cap garnished with the red and yellow plumes, and, people whispered, a steel corselet beneath her jacket. She appeared upright, one who would vanquish not only her enemies but her own weakness.

The Scots applauded her sudden action, her courage and her activity. She seemed suddenly not only popular but triumphant. Scotland rallied to her as she had always declared Scotland would. The Queen, shaking off her languors and her parasites, galloped

after rebels.

At St. Andrews she signed a Proclamation against her brother, accusing him of insatiable ambition, of using his religion to cover his ungodly designs, of creating unrest by means of which he might obtain the Crown for himself. In plain language, he would be King himself and administer the kingdom, "leaving us as a mere title."

By the end of August she had five thousand armed, provisioned men behind her. This excited her and gave her an air of nobility and grandeur. It seemed as if she really loved these people who had taken up her quarrels, so generously did she speak to them, so graciously did she smile upon them. It seemed as if she really cared for this country of her father's. She became admired, beloved, a symbol of ancient royalty. Men forgot her unwise marriage, forgot her foreign favourite and took up her quarrels gladly.

Twelve hundred men gathered round the Earl of Moray. He was penniless; his sole reliance was on possible help from England. His estates, his revenues, his honour were all forfeit. The Queen pursued him and his small force from Stirling to Glasgow, from Paisley to Hamilton, from Hamilton to Edinburgh.

Moray and Argyll led their irregular rabble of troops through Edinburgh streets and were fired on by Lord Erskine, who held the Castle. They escaped to Dumfries, where on hearing that the Queen was pursuing them with a growing force of nearly ten thousand men, Moray dispersed his few troops and retired over the Border.

When the Queen heard this she laughed, as if there was nothing more to be feared in the world. She was Queen indeed, she was great, she was powerful, she was triumphant.

With her victory, a flicker of her old passion for her husband returned.

She considered him and cautiously approved him. He had not been called upon for any heroic or difficult action and he was often sullen and violent. She knew that the very Lords and men who followed him detested him, yet he had looked well enough at the head of his troops, on his sombrely appointed horse as he rode through the rough country ways, cities, and streets. He had been, this man of her impetuous and sudden choice, at least a fine symbol of a king and her malice was gratified to think how sore Moray's pride would be that this gilded puppet had driven him from the kingdom after which he hankered so greedily.

At St. Andrews she had been very loving with her sulky and bewildered lord and had wooed him out of his mistrustful silence. She could scarcely afford to quarrel with him, and yet she meant to keep him in his place. She would not give him the Crown Matrimonial so easily, and she would not let him attend the Privy Council; documents should pass with her name alone on them. It would be very foolish to resign any power to one so unstable and jealous.

Yet, partly because she was still sometimes attracted by his strength and beauty and partly because in this split kingdom she wished to keep him true to her, she wooed him back to his allegiance. She even flattered him, giving him some credit for the bloodless, easy victory. But when she lay in his arms in the castle at St. Andrews she had told him something that had not pleased him at all.

She had recalled three broken, discredited men to Scotland and intended to set them high in command in her new army. These were the Earl of Huntly, a Papist, son of the ruined Cock o' the North, brother to the man whom Moray had beheaded in her presence at Inverness, the Earl of Sutherland, his friend, also banished by Moray, and the wizard Earl of Bothwell.

"It is to confound my brother," she smiled, trying to kiss away her

young husband's frowns.

But he was hostile and doubtful, he objected.

"These men are rogues and scoundrels, loathed by all. They will try to set themselves up." Maybe in his heart he thought: "They will try to dislodge me."

The Queen reassured him, No. These three were loyal and would be good servants. It was only the ambitious Moray whom they did not like and with whom they would not live. It would be clever, it would be cunning to restore them their lands and honours, bind them to one for ever. Bothwell commanded the Border, Huntly the North, why not unite these two leaders in one bond of loyalty? It was thought to make a marriage between Earl Bothwell and Earl Huntly's sister.

"But Bothwell is a heretic," objected the King sullenly. Any such intricate combination always baffled him. He wished that this foolish war was over. He disliked riding all day in his heavy armour. He wanted to return to his field sports and his games. He was even sometimes weary of the Queen, though she could at moments completely dazzle him, when she laughed and caressed him in high spirits.

She did not listen to the murmured criticism about her, the secret reproaches of Mary Seaton. She took no heed of the shrugs and smiles of Maitland nor the scowls of Morton, these two men whose strange loyalty she accepted so indifferently. The three Lords were recalled.

The Queen had sent Earl Bothwell's relative, Murray of Tullibardine, to find him in Paris. This gentleman had been arrested by the English but had contrived to send his chamber-boy to France, and in September, Earl Bothwell presented himself before the Queen with a

great train of armed men from the Border. She liked that unquestioning allegiance, his coming to her despite danger, his waiting on her pleasure without comment.

She said to her husband: "That is how I would be served!" and she promised Bothwell the Governorship of the Border which the young King wanted for his father, the Earl of Lennox, and she allowed Bothwell to ride beside Morton and Atholl in pursuit of the rebels. By October the Queen was in Edinburgh again, Moray had fled to England, Argyll was in hiding in the Highlands, and the Hamiltons had been contemptuously pardoned on condition that they remained five years in exile.

The Queen took off her armour, her helmet, her riding-gauntlets, her skirts, she set aside her pistols and her dagger, for she had no further need of weapons. All her foes were dispersed, humiliated, and vanquished. Moray might cringe and whine at the Court of Elizabeth Tudor, but he was harmless now.

When she had ridden back to Edinburgh the people had acclaimed her. Even the Protestants had seemed gratified and excited by her brave action, by her princely quelling of the rebellion. There were no more murmurs against her, no more doubts were thrown on her shining honour.

Money and promises of more to follow had come from the Pope, and kindly encouraging letters from her relatives in France. She had intrigues afoot with Spain. All would go well, at last she was Queen...

Sighing with delight she told her adventures to Mary Seaton and David Rizzio when they sat by the first fires of autumn in her little closet in King James's Tower.

She had not taken the Italian with her on her swift expedition against

the rebels because she did not wish to anger Henry Stewart when it was necessary that he should preserve the appearance of unity with her. And she had not taken Mary Seaton because the pious girl was tenderhearted and turned sick at bloodshed or violence, and there might have been both in that violent pursuit of the rebels.

Though the Queen had lately met so many of her subjects and been gracious to them all and enjoyed their homage and their adoration, she was glad to return to these two with whom she felt so intimate--the girl who had been her companion all her life and the young man whom she had known only a few months.

She spoke of the quick rides from place to place, the long hours in the saddle, the austere beauty of the countryside. "I swear I love the place, the darkness and the loneliness and the clear air."

She kept her narrowed eyes in the direction of the Italian, who knelt in an attitude of humility the other side of the marble hearth and listened to all her pretty talk and exultations, his lips parted, eyes downcast, his breast lightly rising and falling under the cluster of diamonds.

The Queen had liked, while she had been abroad on her martial arrays, to think of him waiting with his patient resignation. It pleased her to think how impossible it was for him ever to attain what he must desire of her. How close he came to her in one sense, and how far away he was in another.

She allowed Mary Seaton to take off her jacket in his presence and sat there with shoulders bare under the gauze, and feet naked on a cushion, and challenged him to let his colour rise or his eyes gleam.

She rejoiced in the discomfiture and humiliation of Moray, who had tried to rule her, to thwart her and frustrate her, who had denied her

marriage, who had tried to turn away her friends and her favourites. She told Mary Seaton to light more candles, and when the room was ablaze with radiance she sat and talked of the Earl of Bothwell, the sly wizard, the bold soldier, the elegant man all embossed in gold who had ridden beside her standard.

It had been David's advice that he should be brought back from Paris, David who always advised her well.

"You always give me fine counsel, David. I think it was very wise to bring these three men home. They will serve me as no others can. It is a pity that Bothwell is a heretic, but maybe I can turn him from that."

So the Queen flattered the Italian, thanking him for another wise counsel he had given her, which had been not to crush utterly the Hamiltons but merely to hold them at bay, so that they might balance those of the Lennox Stewarts, "Lest my lord the King and his father grow too proud, madame," the sly Italian had persuaded her ready ear. "Hold the balance so, one faction up and the other down, but only by a shade so that when you wish you can turn the scale by your finger's weight."

Yes, that had been good advice, too. She held the difficult King, and his foolish father, whom she had always detested, checked, "Lest they grow too great, David. But they hate it! My good lord is very angry with me, at first because I do not give his father the Governorship of the Border but rather presented it to Earl Bothwell, and second for this matter of the Hamiltons. Oh, they were violent and bloody. They would have had all the Hamiltons butchered. As if I liked such cruel actions."

She spoke indifferently and smiled; she held a little mirror twisted with a serpent in her hand and painted her mouth.

"Oh, David, it is good to be a queen and ride the heather, with thousands of men behind you. I like that cold, clean air, it is sweeter than any perfume. And the taste of the mountain brooks, and those mountains so stately and lonely with the high clouds curled above. Oh, David, it seems to me I reign at last."

She stretched herself on the luxurious reposing-bed, clasping her hands behind her head and looked at her bare feet pressed against the cushion by the rail. Then she glanced sideways at the young man kneeling on the hearth. He was graceful as a fine statue and almost as immovable. She had made him, he was her creation hardly to be known as the mean, half-starved lackey who had found the monkey for her in the chapel. It was amusing to fling him favours and see him snap at them and flourish and grow fat purely because of her whims and fancies.

Mary Seaton broke the train of these pleasant meditations. She began to lament and complain in a high, peevish voice because Earl Bothwell had come back. He was no better than a sorcerer, a man whom everyone loathed and condemned. It would be no credit to the Queen to show him favour. She began to list, half in fear, half with relish, some of the tales of Earl Bothwell's wickedness.

"He will marry," said the Queen, smiling from her cushions, "and no doubt his little wife will make an honest sober man of him."

"Have you seen Jane Gordon?" asked Mary Seaton prudishly.

"No. What does it matter? She is Huntly's sister and will bind the two Houses together." She paused and turned this thought over in her mind. "I will see her, I will have her brought to court. She is very young and simple, I have heard." She lifted her faint brows and sighed: "I would rather like to be Jane Gordon and marry Earl Bothwell. Yes, there are some emotions one must envy. A wizard's wife--"

She sat up impatiently and with a gesture bid David rise from his knees on the hearth. "Come and sit beside me on the couch, David, you are as dumb as Florestan."

As she spoke Mary Seaton turned with an affrighted face.

The King had entered the audience chamber by the newel stair from his apartments and was coming towards the closet, the door of which was open.

"What does it matter?" shrugged the Queen, and she commanded David, who had risen, to take his place on the corner of her couch.

"Oh, madame," sighed Mary Seaton, "the King is angry!"

"When do I see him otherwise?"

The Italian could no longer endure his position; as the King strode into the room he slipped to his knees beside the day-bed and seemed to be telling the rosary which hung at his gold-studded belt.

There were many flames in the room--on the hearth and in the candles stuck in their sticks of gilded copper--and the brightness of all of them seemed reflected in the Queen's defiant eyes. Without rising she stared at her husband as he paused on the threshold.

He looked at the Italian, looked at her, opened his lips, but did not speak. She admired him, his size and height, the colour of his bright hair in the artificial light. She saw that he had been drinking, was fuddled and confused, and that pleased and excited her too. She, who had ten-thousand victorious men behind her, was not afraid of this stupid, drunken boy.

The Italian glanced up sideways and bent his head again, then

gathered courage from the silence. Slowly he rose to his feet and went to the hearth, where against the shaft of the mantelpiece lay a lute. He picked it up and began to knot carefully the coloured ribbons on the handle. The King's slow glance followed him, then returned to the Queen.

"You are melancholy company to-night, Harry."

The young man stood silent. He had been so bewildered of late often he could think more clearly when he had drunk several large cups of wine; things then seemed to fit into place with certain, undeniable exactitude. Now, for instance, there could be no doubt the woman there was his wife by virtue of a ceremony, but before that she had been his harlot, taken as easily as a common slut. The slim young foreigner, who with such agile nimbleness was fingering the lute, had been his servant, to be beaten and kicked, even by the Antony Standens, and somewhere between the three of them had been some talk of love, honour, manhood. But now this pretence was all torn to shreds, and through the tatters of it they grinned and jeered at him, a strumpet and her pimp.

He walked slowly to the Queen's side and looked curiously down at her bare feet, her nude shoulders and arms. His lips were parted and his eyes bloodshot, his jacket was unbuttoned so that his full bare throat showed. He had a large dagger with hard square red stones in the hilt stuck into his belt.

He stood over his wife and picked up her left hand and looked at the three rings he had given her, one a diamond, one of heavy cut gold, and one of blood-red he had taken from her breast the night in Stirling Castle. He dropped her hand and peered into her face and then down at her half-disclosed bosom where another cluster of diamonds lay. Then, without a word he turned and went away.

All three were silent and then as they heard the door close Mary Seaton began to weep. The Queen sat up angrily; she had seldom felt so stung, so disturbed. In the midst of her great triumph it was as if someone had struck her across the face with a whip, as if she had been shamed publicly.

"Go and fetch the King back," she commanded, and Mary Seaton ran away drying her tears, but soon came back and said he would not come. He was shut in his room below; he had some man with him. She had pressed her ears to a crack and heard them talking.

"He refused me?" asked the Queen. "He knew that I sent you yet he would not come?"

"Yes. I met him on the threshold of his room and he said 'No,' and thrust me away and bolted the door." The Queen said:

"Thus it is to have married one such a fool. What did he say, Mary? It is necessary I should know. Did he say anything of me? Did he explain why he came and looked at me and went like that?"

Mary Seaton had not the wit to dissemble or make an excuse; she could refuse her mistress nothing.

"He said, 'Tell her I do not want a wench to-night.'"

The Queen put her hand to her cheek as if she felt a bruise. Then she shrugged her shoulders and laughed.

"Well, David will stay and keep me company. Bring in the cards, Mary, and the dice, and that last book which was sent from France."

Mary Seaton began to whimper, to protest, but the Queen ordered her away and when she had gone commanded the Italian to bolt the door.

The young man obeyed in silence. The Queen eyed him, amused to think how his blood must be beating, his senses trembling. Never had her careless favour gone so far. A servant, a scullion. Well, in France she had heard of great ladies who had taken their grooms just out of idleness, a caprice. It was such an easy intrigue and not without piquancy--Venus and the stableman. David was trim and neat, he did not smell of the cellar or the kitchen; there was nothing about his person to offend the most fastidious. How he adored her, and so humbly, with such exquisite courtesy! Never would he insult her as she had just been insulted by one of royal blood, a prince who aspired to be a king, but who was, nevertheless, a stupid boor, a blundering youth.

She turned in her bed.

"David, come here."

He was instantly kneeling before her, hiding his face in the fringed ends of her coverlets. She thought that he wept. "Oh, madame! Oh, madame!"

She smiled. It was like a goddess to be able to grant such happiness. She was victorious now, she could do as she wished. Moray was no longer there to scold or to blame.

"Do you love me, David?"

He became suddenly bold, a king, a conqueror, and stood over her, tall and urgent, speaking thickly in his own harsh tongue.

The Queen put up her hands and laced her fingers behind his smooth bronze hair. She laughed under his desperate kisses, thinking of the fool, who was so soon being punished.

It was Maitland who was enclosed in the King's chamber. It was Maitland who had persuaded him, so subtly that the young man did not know he was being guided, to go up into his wife's chamber and see if the Signor Davie was there. It was Maitland who said to him as he sat with his elbows on his knees and his face in his hands: "Your Grace will know what to do." And who added lightly: "It would have been done long ago if Your Grace had had good advice."

Still staring down at the carpet the young man said in a thick, blurred voice:

"It is true I have been betrayed. I took him out of squalor, some damnable obscurity. He was quick and useful."

"There is no need for Your Grace to run over the tale, which is one to make an honest man retch."

"Sir," said the young King with a sudden simplicity that was more powerful than his rage or his drunkenness, "I would get it clear about the Queen my wife."

"Let His Grace take his mind off that." With an odd, almost tender smile Sir William looked down at the youth. "Perhaps," he said, "when one has cut the canker off the rose--"

"Eh?" asked the miserable young man, staring up with bloodshot eyes. "Eh? Speak plainly!"

"I mean, when this base foreigner has gone--"

"He's upstairs now. I ought to go and do it at once."

Maitland shook his head like one admonishing a child.

"No! Not now! Not that way! It is too easy, and too perilous also. Your

Grace must have support."

Earl Morton approached, with business-like dexterity and coolness, the affair that Maitland broached delicately to him. The Red Douglas had been not a whit less Moray's friend because he remained in the Queen's service. He had thought that he could serve his own interests and that of Moray and the Protestant Church better by remaining an intimate of the Queen's Council than by going into rebellion.

He had none of Maitland's delicate, reluctant desire to serve and save the Queen with the dregs of a one-time tender fidelity. To him she was just a woman, and when he spoke of her it was with scorn. But he continued to remain in her council although she flouted him, to hold office under her though she showed him no favour, to endure her foreign favourites because he believed that hers was the folly that would soon ruin itself.

Now the opportunity had come sooner than he had expected, just when she had felt herself so triumphant. To Moray, lurking in England, secretly helped by Elizabeth Tudor though openly shown an angry countenance by here Morton and Maitland sent secretly by cipher an account of the proposed affair.

Moray approved, a bargain was made. The King would indemnify all, he would bring back the outlawed Lords, and they would avenge his honour and secure him what his wife denied completely--the Crown Matrimonial. But there was a hitch in the plot; both Earl Morton and his friends, Lord Ruthven and Lord Lindsay, Moray's brother-in-law, were contemptuously suspicious of the King, a light, unstable young man--"who drinks too much, who has a sly, amorous woman to his wife. How are we to trust him?" They protested thus, reluctant, hostile and hesitating even after Henry Stewart had set his name to the bond.

So Maitland fetched him one winter night to Earl Morton's house and brought him into an inner room where the Puritan sat before a scanty fire, where the figures of Patrick Ruthven and Lord Lindsay showed in the half-obscurity of the twilight which only one badly burning lamp dispelled.

The young King sat down heavily at the table on which was a worn cloth. He seemed sick, and shuddered in a fevered way; he had looked much altered. They all knew how his wife tormented him, thrusting him out of the council chamber and from her bed and board, and all knew whom it was she put in his place.

The four wary, experienced men considered him, curious at so much wretchedness, doubting him too, so young, untried, seemingly so inconstant. His father was a known traitor, and he had been spoiled in his youth by his ambitious mother. Was he an instrument who would break in their hands?

He sat mute, taking no heed of any of them, waiting for William Maitland to speak, for he always had difficulty with words.

Quietly the Secretary of State began to discuss the murder of the Italian. It was something that must be done, that had been long decided upon, but the question was the manner of it. Neither Ruthven nor Lindsay could see any difficulty there--let the rat be taken as he was creeping up to his hole, on the stair outside his chamber where he slept with his brother Giuseppe. Would it not be easy enough to wait there for him and slit his throat before he had time to squeal?

Morton thought so too. There were plenty of men who would undertake such work--notably that good fellow George Douglas or Archibald Douglas of Wittingham. Morton began to praise these two men--whom he had found so useful--as spies, as forgers, as false

witnesses.

Maitland knew them and approved of them. In person they were accomplished gentlemen and charming companions. Archibald was a parson and a Lord of Session and Morton was his benefactor and patron. For the excitement of it and a little money he would undertake the work. George, the Angus bastard, also was clever at this kind of thing.

The King interrupted by looking up from the table and raising his hand as if entreating silence. His face was quite distorted in the light of the crude lamp. Lindsay threw another log on the fire and a great gust of wind rattled the old casement and the shutters.

"I want him," whispered the young man, expressing himself with difficulty and under great emotion, "taken in the Queen's presence."

Morton and his friends were surprised at this brutality, which they rather admired. They had not thought Henry Stewart possessed of so much spirit. But Maitland put his hand to his throat as one who feels his gorge rise.

The King rose stiffly. He told them in a few rough words that the Queen was going to have a child, but it was not his and that only Rizzio's death in her presence, in her arms if need be, would satisfy him.

"I have been betrayed," he said sullenly, "there's nothing left but this. I thought to be a king--" He checked himself, smiled, and motioned to Maitland. "Come, leave them to it. They know the way of it, I'll undertake everything. You must believe me now."

He asked Maitland to help him from the room for he felt quite weak and sick. Morton nodded approvingly, tugging at his red beard:

Lindsay and Ruthven's suspicions were silenced. If that were the case it was no need to fear the King would betray them or hang back.

"In the Queen's presence," said Maitland, "that might mean to kill her too, and the child?"

No one spoke. Maitland smiled to himself. Perhaps after all as well that way as another. In any case, Moray would return and she would be as nothing. Then the child, the Queen and David's child. Was the fool right there?

He offered the heavy young man his arm and guided him into the street where the wind was harsh and cold and the sky overcast.

They walked slowly under the swift, wind-driven clouds and he spoke, more to console himself than his companion, who hung on him in what seemed the apathy of despair.

"Well, sir, you've had your lesson early. Perhaps you've had your flash of nobility, your hope of honour, but now you see that we are gross and the world base. Here there is nothing grand, nay, nor even tragic. Which of us can deny his senses and which of us can avoid such a base, bloody business as we are on to-night?"

They moved cautiously, for they had come on their secret errand without a light or a servant--there was a moon but it was fitful. Out of this windy dark came the young man's voice.

"She lets him in and shuts me out. She laughs at me, she pulls me up and down and so has from the first. Now tell me, Maitland, you who are so wise, why did she take me? I did not think of her at all, I did not want her. If she would fool me was it for a play?"

"It is of no importance," said Maitland softly. "nothing she does is of

any importance."

The young man did not understand and he began to mutter incoherently.

To Maitland, the whole affair was incredible, fantastic, yet, he was determined to go through with it partly because he never endeavoured to stop the inevitable and partly because there was just the chance that through this act of brutal violence she might somehow be saved. He dared to think of her as purged, punished, and redeemed.

The spring was very early for the north; even in March there was a softness in the air. The Queen lay in bed and longed for flowers that would not come yet, however eager the spring might seem.

Her thoughts were drowsy, self-indulgent, all her passions were at a low ebb. She wanted to be quite alone, she would have no one near her, not even Mary Seaton. She turned over old fantasies, half-forgotten dreams in her mind.

As she moved, she sighed, remembering the child to be born that summer. She did not know if she were glad or sorry; she liked anything that tried her courage, that saved her pride, and this did both. She did not wish to be barren. It was noble to blossom, to bear fruit; it would be noble to be the mother of a king or of a woman like herself who would wed a king.

But it also meant weakness and fatigue, a blurring of her faculties, a slackening of her cleverness. She wanted to sleep and rest, but if she did she could not keep a watchful eye on all the events about her which she sensed just below the surface of her official life.

She would be more important because of the child, enriched both as

a queen and a woman. But she might die. Mary Seaton disturbed the Queen's meditations. It was almost evening, would she rise and take supper?

She asked if her husband had been to her apartment that day.

Mary Seaton said "No," nor yet to the Abbey as she thought. He was probably abroad with the Antony Standens flying his hawks and hounds as usual, or playing on the tennis court. It had been a fine day and seemed nearer April than March.

The Queen sighed, remembering the King as she had seen him in what seemed a moment of transfiguration on the throne in the audience chamber. She sighed again, recalling it was Sunday and that she had not been to Mass. Yes, she would rise and come to supper and Lady Argyll might be bidden. She named one or two other officials of her household who were amusing, talked lightly of current events, who would afterwards play cards or billiards and help to pass the time. David! yes, David must be there, of course. He would play; if she could not have flowers or sunshine she would have sweet music.

Mary Seaton lowered her eyes and said nothing. She called in the French girls and they discussed preparations for the dressing of their mistress.

When she was fully arrayed in her discreet, fashionable clothes there seemed no change in her tall figure, and by candlelight and with the aid of Mary Seaton's careful painting and hair curling, there was no change in her smooth lovely face, though daylight had recently shown her beauty had diminished.

The Queen sat at supper in her little closet between her bedroom and the audience chamber. Her spirits had risen suddenly for no

reason at all, except that everyone else was so gay and good-humoured.

The room, though small, was very cheerful. She had furnished it exquisitely and it sparkled like a casket of gems with the bold red in the arras, a golden-bound agate service on the table, gildings on the chairs, gold again in a stiff brocade which shut out the March night from the windows. Everyone was easy, relaxed, full of news and gossip which the Queen always loved to hear--odds and ends and scraps of politics, tales from the city, jokes and stories.

Lady Argyll, who was very kindly treated by the Queen although her husband was a rebel in hiding, began to talk of Lord Bothwell because she knew this would be a pleasing subject. The Queen had pardoned him before everybody and had done him great honour in his recent marriage with Jane Gordon.

And now, leaning back in her chair on the arm of which sat Florestan the monkey, she listened with interest. Her eyes rested on the Italian where he sat opposite her, pleasant, humble, holding his own by reason of her favour and nothing else among these great people all born his superiors, by his jokes which were shallow but amusing, his comments which were superficial but sounded clever. She liked his audaciousness as she liked the cap of saffron velvet which he, by her express permission, wore on his long bronze hair.

The door in the audience chamber opened and the King came into the room. His appearance struck a note of discord.

He sat down beside his wife without speaking and she, also in silence, continued to feed Florestan the monkey with the dark plums preserved in sugar. It was this kind of sweetmeat she had been eating when, dressed as a page, she had spoken privately to Henry Stewart the night of the festival she had given for him in the long

gallery. She remembered this as she caressed the monkey in the hostile silence.

The King scowled at her guests. He did not like Lady Argyll and her brother, Lord Robert Stewart, the Governor of Holyrood House, nor Arthur Erskine, now the Captain of the Guard, not only because they were friends of Moray but because they were so often with the Queen and, the young man believed, working against him. But, whilst he gave them quick looks of disdain, he took no notice whatever of David Rizzio, who had so far dared his fortunes as not to rise when the King entered but remained negligently leaning on the table-board.

The Queen, with a casually indifferent air more stinging than a rebuke, asked her husband if he had supped and he said: "Yes, in my chamber below with Lord Morton, Ruthven, and Lindsay."

She wondered why he had come. Three nights ago he had tried to force his way into her apartment, threatening to break the door down and so at last she had opened it. When he had found David Rizzio inside with his piles of papers, he had turned on his heel and gone out without a word and the Queen had thought she would be rid of him for some while.

She looked over her shoulder. She was used to his heavy silences but this seemed to hold a menace she had not noticed before. She continued to feed the monkey, laughing at his snatching hands and puckered, wrinkled face. She was angry with her husband for his boorishness, no doubt he was mad with jealousy of David. Well, let him make himself as agreeable and useful as the Italian and he might look to find the same favour.

Lady Argyll and her brother began talking together in embarrassed whispers. The Italian was in no way discomfited, but seemed to enjoy

the wrath of the King as if he were master of them all.

Then suddenly Henry Stewart did the last thing his wife would have expected of him. He put his arms round her waist and kissed her on the cheek exactly at that moment as Lord Ruthven, who had been mentioned as one of the company dining with the King in the rooms below, entered through the door in the newel stair which had admitted the King.

Ruthven wore armour and his visor was pulled down. As he stood blinking in the light, the King's arms tightened round his wife's waist.

The Italian, from whose face the smiling insolence had been wiped away by a sudden fear, rose instantly from his place at the table and went into the far corner of the room, which was so small that he was still close to the others.

The Queen's alert glance flickered for an instant on the Italian, then turned steadily to hold Ruthven.

"I thought, sir, that you were ill, that you were in so bad a case that I thought of visiting you."

"Madame, I have strength enough for my duty," replied the armed man sourly.

"I do not like your words nor the roughness of your coming," exclaimed the Queen, rising and snatching her husband's arm from her waist.

"I have not to do with you, madame, but with that villain," and he nodded towards the Italian drawn up against the further wall, yet no more than twelve feet from Lord Ruthven. "Come forth, Signor Davie, this is no place for you."

"It is the place where I have put him," retorted the Queen, haughtily.

"Let no more be said of that for honour's sake!" exclaimed Ruthven, advancing on the Italian, at which the Queen cried out:

"I command you, as your Sovereign, to leave my chamber!"

She looked at her husband for a second where he stood motionless by the loaded supper-board. His gaze was on Lord Ruthven and his expression different from any that she had seen on his face before.

Robert Stewart and Arthur Erskine had risen in their places. The Queen spoke to them, bidding them, in a steady voice, to turn out Lord Ruthven from her presence, and they advanced on him, but he shouted out:

"Do not touch me, for I will not be handled!"

At this, as if it were a signal, the door into the audience chamber was thrown violently open and on the threshold stood Lord Lindsay with eight men behind him, all in armour.

"Am I to be murdered?" demanded the Queen.

"Madame, we would put down our lives for you," replied Ruthven harshly, "but there is one here who must take his punishment."

At that the Queen placed herself in front of the Italian, who was cowering in his corner. Lindsay and his men advanced, knocking over the supper-table so that the dishes and meat, the preserved fruits, the lights and the bottles of wine were spilled over the skirts of Lady Argyll, who stood dismayed and useless between her brother and Arthur Erskine who, seeing they were overpowered, remained silent.

Lord Ruthven, cold and passionless, plucked the Queen away from where she stood with arms and skirts outspread in front of the Italian who was whimpering and kissing a relic in a crystal case.

"Take your lady wife, sir," he ordered the King.

The closet was so crowded that it was impossible for anyone to move. The only light was a torch held by a man behind Lindsay, and one candle on a sideboard, for most of the candles had gone out with the overturning of the table and the soft scented wax had been trampled underfoot with the filigree dishes and the sweetmeats, and the glass. But the King moved to the wall and held the Queen there against the tapestry.

Ruthven seized the shrieking Italian, snatched off his cap, and passed him to the man behind him as if he had been a rag doll. He was hurled from one to another, lurching, plunging, bruised, soon half-naked, bleeding and screaming. He was thrust through the press of armed men out into the bedroom and so into the Chamber of Presence, while the Queen lay still as a corpse in her husband's grasp. She would not submit to the indignity of a useless struggle. She closed her eyes as the Italian was dragged past and put her fingers to her ears as his screams echoed through the hot room.

The King released her without a word and followed the other men out of the room. A pretty little French clock in the corner struck eight--the whole business had taken no more than five minutes.

The Queen sank down on the floor. There was one candle burning above the low bed in the corner and Lady Argyll made her way to this and from it lit several others which she placed on the sideboard.

The Queen rose and stumbled towards the door in the audience room, but this had been bolted.

"What will they do to him?" she whispered.

"I suppose, madame, they intend to bring him to trial."

"For what offence?"

"Madame, come away to the bedchamber. Maybe they will return."

"Where is your brother?" asked the Queen, "and Arthur Erskine?"

"Madame, I do not know. They have been forced away with the others."

"Then we are quite alone?"

"Yes, madame. Come into the bedchamber."

Lady Argyll held aloft the candle and the Queen stared down at the confusion, the things on the floor, the dishes of agate and mother-of-pearl, the lace cloth stained with wine, the dish of preserved plums, and among it a twist of grey fur and two thin hands held upward.

"Oh, Florestan! See, they have killed Florestan!"

The Queen stooped and gathered up the dead monkey and burst into dry and desperate sobs.

Lady Argyll, who had seen the King's face and who feared that the night's work would not be over, drew her mistress into the bedchamber through which the Italian had been dragged. The outer door was fastened. Listening there Lady Argyll could hear nothing.

The Queen crouched on the bedstep with the dead monkey wrapped in a linen cloth on her knees.

Lady Argyll could not induce her to move or to speak, although she reminded her of her child and begged her for his sake to keep her courage.

But when the bolts of the outer door were drawn the Queen did look up.

"Perhaps they have come for me now. Light more candles."

Lady Argyll obeyed with hands that shook like the flames that leapt up under them.

Two men entered the bedchamber--the King and Lord Ruthven.

"Well," said the Queen, looking up from where she sat with the dead monkey on her lap, "what have you done with David?"

"Madame," replied Lord Ruthven, "do not speak that name."

The King passed him and leant against the tester of the bed. "Do you mourn for David?" he asked. She answered: "It shall be dear blood to some of you if his is spilt."

The King replied with difficulty:

"He has had more of you than I for two months. How often have I come to your door and been turned away saying you would not or you were sick, while he was within?" Then "Oh!" he said, drawing back; "what is that you have on your lap?"

"It is Florestan, who was killed in this brutality."

"It looks like a child," said the King staring.

"It is your good luck it's not a child--yours!"

"My child!" he sneered, and went to the window where Lord Ruthven sat on a great chest and asked for God's sake for a moment of repose and a drink of wine for he was a very sick man and had got up from a bed where he had lain three weeks to be present at this night's work.

Lady Argyll, who could scarcely move for fright, went into the little closet and found a decanter of wine, filled a horn cup with it and brought it back to Lord Ruthven. In between his drinking he stared at the Queen, telling her that she should be dutiful to her husband and obey him and not set him down for any favourite. And she, not moving, replied:

"Well, if he had a hand in it I shall leave him."

Lord Ruthven said that a woman might not leave her husband.

"Sir," said she, "your wife left you and I might leave my husband."

At that Lord Ruthven, glancing on the King, who still leant against the bed, answered:

"Think, madame, upon the baseness of this man—he was a worthless creature!"

There was a great sound in the forecourt and the Queen sprang up, thinking it might be a rescue or the Provost who had turned out to see what the uproar was at the palace. But Ruthven, with all his feebleness, was quickly in front of the window and the King had her by the wrist.

"I'll go downstairs," she cried. "I'll see who holds the great hall."

Ruthven answered:

"Lindsay and his men are down there, no one will get in. And, madame, were you to force yourself on their company--"

"Why not?" she asked, twisting her wrist in her husband's fingers and with the other hand holding the dead monkey as if it were a baby to her breast. "Why not? May I not ask help from my city?"

"There are those who would sooner see you cut in pieces and flung over the Abbey wall," replied Ruthven. "If you have killed David--" she began. Thinking of this, and the memory of his shrieks and his eyes as he had crouched in the corner, her lips quivered and she began to cry hysterically. She reminded them of the powerful relatives she had--the King of France and the Princes of the House of Guise. She told them that she was under the protection of the Pope and in the friendship of the King of Spain, "And if any harm comes to me or my child for these outrages, you shall answer to them."

Ruthven replied indifferently,

"Madame, these names are too much for me who am nothing but your humble subject. And as for what I have done to-night, I am answerable to God alone."

Then Lady Argyll, whose nerves were strained to breaking-point, cried out to the King:

"In the name of pity, sir, let go of her hand, she will rub the skin off her wrist struggling. Think of her state."

"Who has thought of that?" sighed the Queen. "If I and the child had both perished to-night I believe none of you would have been disappointed."

She sat down on the bed, laying the corpse of Florestan on the

pillow, and pulling out her kerchief wiped her face, which was damp, and with this gesture took off all the pomades and painting. She looked suddenly pale and haggard and quite different. She pushed off her coif and ran her fingers through her hair and loosened her dress as if she could bear no burden.

The King looked at her intently with a rising desire. She whispered:

"Have I no friends? Where is Earl Bothwell and Lord Huntly?"

Ruthven told her directly.

"On the tumult first arising they thought themselves too much your friends and escaped out of a window and so are gone. There is no help there, madame, you must satisfy yourself and take what has happened."

The Queen looked at the King's belt and saw an empty dagger sheath there.

"Where is your dagger?" she asked.

He seemed confused and muttered, "I dropped it somewhere, I don't know."

"You have taken your last from me and your farewell," said the Queen.

Upon which Lord Ruthven scolded:

"That were a pity. He is Your Majesty's husband and you must yield duty each to another. For your honour's sake, madame, make no quarrel about this man who was an enemy to nobility, a shame to you and a destruction to Your Grace's company. And remember, madame, that the more Your Grace shows yourself offended, the

more the world will judge the worst."

All the while the King, leaning on the bed tester, was staring at his wife, and Ruthven, not liking the look of him and remembering how fearful he and his fellows had always been of this young man's weakness and the woman's power over him, plucked him by the sleeve and drew him away, reminding him that the commotion in the court continued. It might mean that Bothwell and some of his following had returned or that the Provost would not be pacified. How did they know what friends she had? Argyll, who should have been here with his forces had not yet arrived.

So they went away and left her alone with Lady Argyll, who was useless with fright, and the dead monkey whose blood was staining the pillow. She got up and walked about the rooms, and found that on every side she was shut in by guards who even filled the corridor, the other side of which slept Mary Seaton and the French girls. She was a prisoner in her own house.

The Italian's body, in which were fifty-six wounds, lay on the chest in the porter's lodge. He had been killed in the Chamber of Presence, the Scots nobles so crowding upon one another to thrust their knives into him that he had been trampled underfoot, his damask gown wrenched from his back, his jewels snatched away, his hose torn from knee to ankle. Unrecognizable, a heap of clotted blood and naked bones, he had been thrown down the stairs, to Lindsay's men who had kicked him to the porter's lodge, the King's dagger stuck between his ribs.

His face was featureless from blood and dirt, from his split skull the brains oozed on to his tangled hair. The porter grumbled at the mess in his lodgings, but he was glad of the death of the wretched Italian. He fetched a sack to put over the corpse and told the grooms and scullions who were crowding in the doorway with lanterns to see this

sight that it was "fitting the rascal should lie there. It was his first bed when he came to Holyrood and one given him then, as now, for charity, an ungrateful, insolent villain."

The Queen washed her hands and face. She made an effort to control her weakness, her disgust, anger and fear as she would have made one to overcome her enemies. She kept telling herself she must think of nothing except how to get away, how to escape. Once she could get free of Holyrood she could rally her people round her. Every entrance barred, every way guarded, not even her women were allowed to pass...Her thoughts went round and round this fact till her senses reeled.

Lady Argyll had gone out several times on to the stairhead and asked some of the men whom she saw coming up and down if the Queen might have her women, but she had been bluntly refused. She entreated the Queen to undress and go to bed and try to rest for the remainder of this fearful night.

"Madame, you must think of the child. You ought to think of nothing but that."

"The child is safe enough, do not fear for that," replied the Queen. "I am quite calm and resolved, indeed I am. But we must get away from here. Would you have thought Lord Bothwell would have gone? I took him for so brave a man! No one comes! Do they leave us all alone? What did you see when you went out just now?"

"Only that the house is full of armed men. I saw Lord Ruthven again, looking like death, and Lord Lindsay and Archibald Douglas."

"Did you hear anything of David?"

"No, madame. Nor dare I ask. I begged one of them to let the

midwife pass, I thought at least they could not refuse that. It would have been a chance to get a message out. But he said no, all must wait till my Lord Moray came."

"Moray!" breathed the Queen. All the night's events took on a different aspect. She had not thought of him. "I might have known these brutes were only tools," she said fearfully, then controlled herself. "Moray."

"Yes, madame. They think he comes to-night or tomorrow morning with my Lord Argyll."

"They must have been lurking very close, waiting for this signal. But you will be glad to see your husband, again," said the Queen faintly.

"Madame! Not if he comes on this bloody business. I fear it is a revolt."

"My brother Moray is a man of peace," said the Queen, still with that thin smile on her colourless lips. "He is never present when these ugly deeds are done. Do you not remark that? But he may have directed it from afar."

"He will surely see you, madame, as soon as he arrives. You will be able to arrange something with him."

"He is not my best hope."

"There is no other, madame."

"Yes. There is my husband." She spoke these words with such bitterness and contempt that the woman who listened winced. "Can you go down softly and find him or send him a message and say I wish to see him?" She drew the blood-red wedding-ring off her finger and gave it to her companion. "Show him this, hold it in the palm of

your hand then open the fingers and let him see it. Perhaps it is true that he did not know what they intended. If David is dead, maybe his jealousy is spent and he will come. Yes, lately I have denied him. Did you note how he looked at me?"

Lady Argyll stared at her, horrified.

"You want him to come to you to-night?"

"Yes." With a deliberate smile at her own degradation, she said: "Tell him that I will lie with him to-night."

The Queen went to the tall mirror she had brought with her from France and looked at her newly washed face. It was quite colourless, and her hair straggled on to her shoulders and hung in wet rings on her high forehead.

Her dress was all dishevelled, the monkey's blood had stained it across the front and the disarray of her heavy brocade skirt showed her pregnancy. With steady hands, she adjusted her clothes and out of a great casket stamped with fleurs-de-lis, she took out all the pearls she had brought from France and hung them on her neck and wrists. With firm strokes she brushed her hair and pulled it into a little caul studded with emeralds.

It was a long time since she had dressed herself, but she found she could manage very well without the French girls or Mary Seaton. She took out her box of paints and coloured her mouth, put gold dust on her eyebrows, and violet powder on her hair, and smoothed her cheeks with orris dust. Then she emptied a phial of perfume on to her dress and returning to the bed, picked up the corpse of Florestan, kissed it, and laid it beneath the shrine in the corner, then turned the pillow and put it with the bloodstains underneath.

She heard his step outside, and looked at herself again in the mirror. She was more like a statue than a woman, there was something unnatural in her face, in her movements, in the splendour of her over-gaudy clothes and jewels.

He came in, pushing back the door violently with the flat of his hand. He was not alone; she could scarcely restrain a cry of fury when she saw Ruthven, still in the clanging armour, behind him. No doubt they feared her, no doubt they had guessed what she was about to try to do and they would not let the fool out of their sight.

But he, lustful and half-drunk was half-won. His eyes were bright, the tension had gone from his face. He was proud and confident again. Yes, undoubtedly he had murdered the Italian, she could almost smell blood on him.

He approached the bed, stared at her with reddened eyes and took her hand with the one on which he had put the crimson wedding-ring.

"Lord Ruthven," said the Queen smiling, "you desired me to yield to my husband, and so I intend to do. Let to-night's work be overlooked."

"Your Grace asks us no more of David?" asked Ruthven, leaning exhausted in the tall doorway.

"I ask no more of anything," said the Queen steadily. "Leave me with my husband that I may make my pact and peace with him."

She smiled at the young man and asked: "You'll stay?" He replied thickly: "Then I may pass the night with you?"

She nodded, but Ruthven had advanced and gripped him by the arm.

"Sir, you must show yourself below. There are those who are not

satisfied. They want to speak to you that you may answer for the Queen."

The King hesitated, then was swayed by the stronger will.

"I'll return," he muttered to his wife. "In a few minutes, maybe half an hour, I'll return. If you'll be kind at last, and let me lie with you."

She moved after him heavily and detained him as Lord Ruthven passed into the ante-chamber. She touched the red ring on his finger, whispering, entreating:

"Remember the night at Stirling when I gave you that. I shall wait for you."

She saw the colour rise into his face and eyes, the veins in his neck swell. She could smell the wine on his breath and she looked again at the empty dagger sheath.

"I'll wait," she repeated before Ruthven pulled him away.

When they had gone Lady Argyll could not restrain herself from reproaching her mistress, "Oh, madame, how can you let him stay with you to-night! He was in that business if ever a man was. Signor David has been murdered, I dare swear. Oh, madame, it is not many hours past since we heard him shrieking! Can you forget?"

The Queen shook her head.

"Undress me! Do me this service for they will not let the girls or Mary Seaton come to me. See, poor Florestan beneath his shrine--he looks almost human in his shroud. I suppose David lies like that now, with just as many wounds, battered so beneath their feet. He had no absolution, not as much as a Cross to kiss..."

"Madame, you must put that out of your mind. Yet to allow the King--"

"Get me my nightgown with the cypress border. This is the bed I had at Stirling. I thought to use another but my mother loved this."

Lady Argyll could only suppose that her mistress was unwell in her mind for such a triviality at such a moment to interest her. She helped the Queen take off all her jewels and her dress and get into her nightgown with the border of golden cypress. She was embarrassed but overawed. When the Queen had undressed she began to shiver violently, went to the shrine, knelt beside Florestan and made the sign of the Cross over the small corpse.

"I do this for David," she said. "God has mercy upon strange creatures."

Then she climbed into the sumptuous bed and lay there telling Lady Argyll to go out to her own apartment. "Leave the rest of this night to me."

The Queen waited with one candle on the side table. The bed no longer seemed to her as it had seemed in Stirling. It had become a mausoleum enclosing her for ever in solitude.

She almost savoured her humiliation. David had been a coward. She had noted his fear when he had seen Ruthven in the doorway of the stairs, she had heard his shrieks, he had got behind her and held out her skirts to protect himself. They were right, he was no better than Florestan, who stole and picked and was insolent and fled at a cross word. She felt an infinite compassion for both of them. Though she admired, above all virtues, courage, she had been fond of this man who had had none. She put her hands to her side to feel the weight of the child. She was already avenged there. Stewart would never be sure that the heir to Scotland was his.

The candles burnt out, the winterdawn light slid between the stiff curtains of the window. The Queen remained alone.

In the chamber below, the King sprawled in a drunken stupor. When Ruthven had brought him down from his wife's room the word had got round to the Lords in possession of the palace that the woman was setting her traps. The sick man, with his last ounce of strength told the conspirators that the Queen had attired herself in pearls and brocade and painted her face and persuaded the King to lie with her and that he had consented.

So they pulled him, already sagging from drink, into his own room and Ruthven, who knew of many such tricks, put a potion into the wine they forced on him, so that after two or three cups he sank between them, utterly drunk.

The two Antony Standens, who acted under the direction of Lord Ruthven, then heaved him up and laid him on his bed under the grim scrutiny of the Lords. Then they went below into the entrance place and into the forecourts to wait for the coming of Lord Moray and Argyll, the two men who should take the lead in this disorder. The Earl Morton had arrived at the palace soon after the murder, at which he appeared very well satisfied.

So they took their repose, David in the porter's lodge, the King drugged on his couch, the Queen waiting in her bed.

The King woke, still feeling half-drugged. He yawned and sat up, saw his gentlemen moving about the room and called for water and drank avidly. Then he remembered with a sudden shock, the Queen's promise of last night and how he had not gone to her.

So, without a word to anyone, he went up the newel stair and into her room where she lay quite alone in the great bed with the corpse of

the monkey beneath the shrine in the corner. In her hand, stretched slack on the coverlet, was a little reliquary which she looked at now and then.

The young man sat down by the bed and in a broken voice began to reason with her and to excuse himself, but she did not reply and pretended to be asleep. He began to plead with her, reminding her that though he might be of low estate compared to hers yet at the altar she had promised to be obedient to him. He said that his life had been like hell from loneliness, humiliation, and frustration. He could never have a game of cards with her but that David must be the third, or sing a song but that David must play the accompaniment...As he said that name she opened her eyes and asked:

"What has become of David?"

"David is dead." He said it sullenly.

Then he wanted to lie down beside her, reminding her of her promise last night, but she shook her head and pretended to sleep again.

The young man knelt on the bedstep, thinking of the night in Stirling and began to weep softly for so much gone wrong. The killing of the Italian had been like the lancing of an abscess, leaving him relieved. He began to hope that everything might be as it had been and even that the child might be his, which was a thing that he had never believed though he had struggled to do so.

The Queen remained immobile like a creature in a trance. She whispered from the pillow:

"Last night I might have received you, but now I am bankrupt of every good grace." Then she asked him in a stifled voice if he in truth had

been in the affair last night. He would not commit himself, but admitted sullenly that the men who now held the palace were his friends.

There was a scratching at the door—it was Lady Argyll, still in the dress she had worn last night. She said that Lord Moray had come to the palace and wanted to speak to the Queen, who sat up.

"Is he your master?" she asked of her kneeling husband.

The young man did not understand her and the Queen asked Lady Argyll to help her from the bed. Without any regard for her attire she took up a winter coat of fur and velvet, and leaning on Lady Argyll's arm went into the Chamber of Presence, where it was very cold for the fire had gone out.

The Queen looked down at the floor and saw a trail of dark spots and stains across the carpet, past the throne and the dais to the outer door.

Lord Moray stood by the hearth which was filled with cold ashes. His sister, Lady Argyll, turned on him at once, crying out against the horrible murder last night, and the extremity the Queen was in and how she had been in fear of her own life and that of her child also.

Moray allowed Lady Argyll to rail on in her fear and anger. He frowned at the Queen who sat on the steps of the dais with her mantle wrapped round her and her hair hanging down over the fur collar saying nothing.

"Mary," he said, "I am sorry to see you in this distress."

"Ah, if you had been at home perhaps I had not been so discourteously handled," she replied. Then, in the same tone: "But were you in it?"

He evaded the direct question as she might have known that he would. She had lost much of her sharpness.

"It had to be done, but I would that it had been done in another manner. You might have lost your life," he said, seeming deeply troubled.

"Well," said the Queen, "you are welcome. Be a good subject to me and I will behave to you as I ought."

There was nothing in her words or gesture to make him think that she recalled how she had driven him out of her kingdom as a rebel and issued a Proclamation forbidding any man to offer him shelter or even as much as a plate of porridge. Her tone admitted him to be the master, as if she knew that he must be wherever he went—his sudden coming now proved his hand in last night's business.

The King appeared in the bedchamber door. Moray spoke to him in a tone of authority, bidding his Grace, for his honour's sake to clear his wife's house of so much soldiery and to help the Lords to go back to their houses so that the tumult in the city might be put down before it got out of hand. And the King, with his eyes on his wife, replied that the Lords would not go on his orders.

"Sir," said Moray, with little heed of this excuse, "go down and answer to these gentlemen for your wife. Say that all has been arranged in amity with her, that she will grant an amnesty and full pardon to all who have offended. Do you not see," he added as the young man hesitated, "that this is a dangerous moment and that there is much to be forgotten?"

Thereupon the King moved away down the Chamber of Presence, and the Queen began to laugh hysterically and on top of the laughter

to weep so that when the door closed on her husband she was shaken by sudden tears.

"Am I to forgive these men? You know what they did last night? Never have I lived through hours so full of horror. I had rather died, yes, James, I had rather died myself."

He stood near her struggling to hold himself in check and she, even through her tears, realized this, and rising, threw herself into his arms and wept on his shoulder as if there had never been discord between them and he had always been her chosen guardian.

"Madame, cast off your care and passion, I beg you humbly. I shall study what may be best for your safety and honour. I promise that you will receive from your subjects obedience and honour if only you will take to heart this lesson."

He put her away from him and looked down into her face. "Before God, Mary, I renew my offer which I made before."

"All these conspirators, then, all these confederate Lords, are friends of yours?" she asked.

"I do not say so, Mary, nor that they worked under my orders. I have been in England."

"I know something of your doings," said the Queen. "We infringe on politics. You say that you can answer for these men if I pardon them?"

"Yes, for I know their grievances and their minds. Now for yourself you see to what dishonour your whims can bring you. I call them whims, Mary, I would not use an uglier word."

He took her by the shoulder and turned her about so that she was

forced to face him.

"The child?" he demanded. "The child is Scotland's rightful heir?"

"I can swear it before God," she answered readily.

He thought she lied, but he was relieved that she had such an answer so readily. Yet he could not be satisfied and pressed her further.

"You know what has been thought and said. It was not that man lying below?"

"Ah! you've seen him?" she asked softly. "That man lying below! Poor David! James, they killed my monkey in the struggle--poor Florestan, who was so neat and clever. Will you take him out and see him buried?"

She went back to her room and Moray returned to the Lords gathered in various groups in the palace, unsure what to do. He told them that the Queen would pardon them and hold them immune from punishment in the future. She had promised as much to himself, he said, and the King confirmed this with an oath saying she would do as he bid. Moray added that they might do more than demand pardon for the outrage done in her house and even exact from her further concessions for the Protestants and a promise to have no more Mass performed in Holyrood and no more foreign favourites. He, Moray, once more master of Scotland, would see that she kept these promises.

Lady Argyll came to her brother, Lord Moray, and implored that a midwife and some women might be sent to the Queen for she had fallen ill and seemed to be losing her strength. It could be that her child was to be born before its time endangering her life, and seeing that she had pardoned the Lords and granted their requests, surely

the guards might be moved from her door and Mary Seaton and the French girls, at least, allowed to go in freely?

Moray granted that but said that the Queen must not come out of her chamber. Many of the Lords disliked even this concession and said she seemed strong enough and perhaps her sickness was only a pretence.

Then the Queen sent for Sir William Maitland and tried to persuade him, saying she had promised pardon and was that not enough? Might she not go away to, say, Dunbar? While she spoke she was wondering what part this crafty man had had in the murder of David and how much he was her enemy. But this she could not discover, and although he was gentle and almost humble her tears and entreaties did not move him. He told her that the Lords would not allow her to leave the palace, which was still heavily guarded so that there was only one way by which she could escape and that was through the newel staircase by which the murderers had entered which led through her husband's rooms and beyond them out into the garden and the old burial-ground.

About the middle of the afternoon there was a scratch at the door of the room where Giuseppe Rizzio had been cowering all night. The boy stifled an instinctive shriek with the back of his hand. The scratching was repeated and as it seemed timid, almost apprehensive, and in no way associated with violence, he found courage to rise from his bed and creep to the door.

In a voice shaking with fear he asked who was there. A wheezy female voice replied: "A friend!"

Giuseppe hesitated, fearing a trap, but he realized his own desperate situation. He could not for ever remain a prisoner in his room without water or food, so he slipped the bolts with fingers that

fumbled at the first attempts and stared out into the dimly-lit corridor, and what he saw reassured him. A stout woman of about forty stood there. She had a bundle on her arm and panted from quick walking. Giuseppe knew her as Lady Reres and also as a woman of bad reputation who had lately been shown some favours by the Queen.

She pushed past the boy without an invitation and sank on to the painted chest inside the door which he again bolted.

"Listen! You know what happened?"

Giuseppe nodded and quick tears over-brimmed his eyes.

"Bah!" said Lady Reres, striking her fat thigh with a podgy hand. "What is done is done and there is plenty of work for the future without thinking over the past. I suppose you want to get out of here?"

Giuseppe nodded, his throat and lips were dry, he could hardly speak, especially this foreign tongue with which he was so little familiar. He strained his attention to catch what the fat woman said.

"The Queen's a prisoner, boy, do you hear? Moray and Maitland are in charge now. It seems the other Lords are only their tools. That is a pretty state of affairs, is it not? The Queen has had to pardon all the murderers."

"She pardoned the men who killed David?"

"She had to. In the Chamber of Presence where his blood had hardly been wiped up they went on their knees and asked for pardon. She said she bore no malice to any of them and what was done was done. They allowed the midwife to go in to her and she sent her out with a letter to me. The Queen has no hope but in one man and, to him you must take a message."

The Italian began to shake. He did not want to do anything that was difficult or responsible. Lady Reres observed his fear and exclaimed contemptuously:

"Ha! What do you think will happen to you, shut away here? Presently they will remember you and hunt you out, but for an hour or two they will not think of you; they are busy ransacking your brother's chamber."

"Ah! poor David, all his fine clothes and savings!"

"Ay, indeed, too much of either for his credit's sake," sneered Lady Reres. "I hear they have found two thousand crowns in gold hidden away, together with jewels and many suits of velvet and furs. Fourteen pairs of hose!" She rocked to and fro, laughing, her hands on her fat sides. Then, recollecting her business, she gave her bundle, which she had dropped on the floor on her entrance, a kick towards the boy.

"Put that on, it is a set of girl's garments. With a kerchief tied over your head you should pass as a washer-maid, and be able to set out without question. Here!" From her enormous bosom she drew a letter. "It is a message you are to deliver. You are to wait for the answer and bring it back to me in the Exchequer House, where I shall be waiting. You had better be honest and quick, for your life depends upon this, too."

"To whom am I to deliver the letter, madame?"

"To Earl Bothwell. You will find him at Earl Huntly's house. You know where that is, or can easily find out. If Earl Bothwell is not there you will give it to Lord Huntly. If Lord Huntly is not there to Lord Sutherland, and if you can find none of them you must run round till you do."

Giuseppe did not like this errand at all. He was quite unnerved by his brother's murder, and by the night he had just spent. He reached to the bed and picked up the crucifix.

"Earl Bothwell is a son of Satan," he muttered. "I do not want to get into his power. I have heard such stories of him--"

"Ay, I suppose so," replied Lady Reres comfortably, "among the scullions and grooms who used to be your company there would be such tales. Ah, well, if he has any infernal arts they may be useful now."

She smiled, nodded, and turned away with the air of one whose business is done and Giuseppe Rizzio remembered, with a shock of fear, that she also was credited with being a witch.

Lord Moray was not much given to laughter, but he had a dry humour and this was tickled by the situation in which he found himself, as he returned to his house in the palace grounds where his wife, Agnes Keith, had lived during his rebellion.

He was master again, of the Queen of Scotland, after being completely defeated in the field and forced to fly to the English Court. The Queen's foolish flirtation had after all caused only a short interruption in his rule of her kingdom. She had, with her armed men, chased him from town to town and across the Border, and when she had felt herself safe he had suddenly walked into her palace, master of all she possessed, even her life.

The main part of their quarrel had been her inexplicable marriage and he had used that marriage as a weapon against her, employing her infatuated young husband as an instrument to remove her favourite.

Moray had not been able to live in peace while David Rizzio breathed. But he had gone, and the Queen, who had defied him had flung herself sobbing into his arms and begged him humbly for the meanest favours, the company of her woman, the removal of her guards, a little liberty, the attendance of a midwife in her distress.

He had exacted handsome terms. She was to pardon all his accomplices who in his absence had done the dirty work for him. She was to restore him to all his estates, and Maitland to his power, and Morton to the full exercise of his office of which he had been lately deprived.

He greeted his wife tenderly and listened with an affectionate smile while she pleaded for the Queen. Agnes Keith insisted that she had no knowledge of politics, nor could she greatly commend the Queen's behaviour, but, she argued, the Queen was generous and kind, it was impossible to dislike her.

"Look how I have lived, sir, while you were a proclaimed rebel--used with every courtesy, living here like a princess, allowed to touch your revenues, maintain your liveries on my servants, received into her intimacy. And the same with Lady Argyll, your sister, whose husband was in arms against her--"

"That is his business, I have other things to think of. Do not upset yourself, madame, I shall deal generously with the Queen."

It gave him great pleasure to say these words; it gave him intense satisfaction to think that it was in his power to fulfil that boast--to save the Queen.

Sir William Maitland waited on Lord Moray to decide exactly what they should do. David was dead, the Lords were indemnified, the Queen was a prisoner, repentant, submissive to all their demands.

Everything might be as it had been before the Queen's marriage, except that they would have more power over her—they might even force her to change her religion.

But Moray, walking up and down the darkening room said there was one difficulty—King Henry. They had used him as an instrument of their revenge, as an instrument of their recall but, once again, was he an instrument that might break in their hands?

Their eyes met.

"He answered for his wife," said Maitland. "He said she was a true princess and would keep her word. That was when Ruthven and Lindsay mistrusted her promises. They fear her cunning and his weakness—it seems they were reconciled last night within a few hours of the making away of the servant David. Had not Ruthven doctored his drink he would have gone with her."

Moray did not answer. He put his hand over his tired eyes. He had ridden hard in the last few hours and not slept at all since he had come to Holyrood, but his mind was still alert.

"Can she forgive him?" urged Maitland.

"She might pretend to do so. She has chosen him as her husband and now she must keep him. She promised him the Crown Matrimonial in return for our recall. Let him have it, he will scarcely interfere in serious affairs. He only wants a sham dignity—call him Grace and Majesty and doff the cap and it is enough. He'll be away with his sports, his hawks and hounds, and his English friends."

"Can he forgive her?" asked Maitland. "We deal with a man and a woman although we name them King and Queen. They are very young and the Queen I know to be vindictive."

"Her claws are cut, her sting is drawn, her vindictiveness will spend itself as her other passions have. Rizzio will be forgotten as others were forgotten."

The names of John Gordon and Chastelard hung in the air, but neither men spoke them.

"Can he forgive her? I do not know, but she is young and beautiful, and soon it seems brought him to her side again--two hours after David's death, you say?" Moray thrust off that thought with a frown.

"Surely," he said, "I can manage Henry Stewart, and his father, too, and all the Lennox faction. If they go warily they will have no cause for complaint."

Maitland shook his head.

"I do not think it quite as easy as that. She is very subtle." Then he asked directly: "What of the child? Do you know anything of that?"

Again the two men looked at each other.

"It is Scotland's heir," said Moray distinctly, and Maitland nodded. "It is the Queen's child and will be born in full safety and honour. And anyone who dares to think--"

Maitland's thin, dry smile completed the sentence. "So be it."

"Perhaps out of all of this," mused Moray, "the child alone is important. If we look beyond this present chaos the only thing that matters is that these two kingdoms be united, and in the child we have a definite hope?"

Maitland asked delicately:

"But if the King should not acknowledge it? Remember that he has spoken his opinion on this matter."

"He must be brought to discretion," said Moray. "I stayed a little too long upon the road," he added. "They outran their instructions in letting it be done in her presence. That was wrong, Maitland, that might have killed her. We might have lost the child too."

Maitland countered crisply: "And there would have been a throne vacant for you, so what would it have mattered?"

"I am ready to take the throne if occasion arise, but I would not have it done like that. Why could not the fellow have been taken from his lodgings?"

"They would have had it so. Even fanatics like Patrick Ruthven would not have had it in the Queen's pre-sense, but it was the King, he willed it. He wanted her shamed."

"But it could have been so easily done without involving her at all," said Moray. "I'd like to punish him for that. I'll never forgive him for that."

"Indeed, I am not sure of him. He drinks very heavily and his father encourages his arrogance. Plainly, he is a fool."

"To-night," said Moray, "in an hour or so, when we can go quietly, we will wait upon him in his chamber and tell him our mind, our terms."

The King was alone in his room that night with John Taylor, his chamber-boy, with whom he played cards to distract himself. The relief he had felt at the removal of David had gradually changed into apprehension for the future. He did not like the instant appearance of Moray, although it had been part of the bargain that he should call him and his friends from banishment. The presence of the dark,

silent man directing him and his fortunes, disturbed the young man.

Then, he had been greatly moved by the Queen's tears and protestations and half-induced to believe that after all there had been nothing but a flirtation with David. Then again, his slowly moving mind would remember all the things found in the Italian's room.

Where had he got all those furs and rich cloths? Where had he obtained two thousand pounds in gold while he, the King, was straitened in his revenues and often had not enough to pay his servants? The Queen would not make him any allowance; she had had an iron stamp prepared so that his signature could be put on papers without his reading them. She had taken his name off the coinage, she had ignored, insulted, and humiliated him in every way, meanwhile David the servant had lived like a king himself.

Henry Stewart threw down the cards, stuck his thumbs in his belt and leant back in his chair while his chamber-boy waited expectantly to snuff the tall, scented candles.

Well, David was finished. The young King tried to still his jealousies, his doubts with that: and the Queen had humbled herself to him! She had been meek and gentle as that night at Stirling, she had sent him the little red ring, she had vowed that she would be an honest and faithful wife, she had sworn that the child was his...

"Sir," whispered John Taylor, leaning across the table, "There is a tapping at the privy door."

"Spies?" Henry Darnley moved suddenly and listened. "I think it is only a mouse or a rat." He put his hand on the weapon at his waist, for he lived in continual fear.

John Taylor went to the door of the newel stair up which last night the

murderers had ascended, and drew the bolts. The King rose and stood on guard.

"Madame," whispered John Taylor, and opened the door wide.

It was the Queen who entered. She wore a horseman's cloak that came to her feet and her hair was gathered into a round cap without a feather.

"You said I never came to you, sir," she murmured, "well, I have come to you to-night. See, here I am." She smiled faintly. "I cannot now wear a page's dress, but I am well disguised."

He set a chair for her and stared at her. She seemed so strange, different from any aspect of her he had known before as she loosened the cloak about her neck and looked up at him with appealing eyes.

"You and I must understand each other, my husband. We are in great peril."

"I?" he asked stupidly, "I?"

"Moray is master," she reminded him, "you have been nothing but his tool. Henry, you are only the marionette, my brother pulls one string and Maitland the other, and you jerk your legs and arms."

"It is not true," he cried. "You would set me down and shame me. What I did I did."

"Did you do it?" she asked, "No, I think not. You are a gentleman and you love me a little--or did once, and I do not think that you ordered those men to murder that poor wretch in front of me who am expecting your child."

He stood silent, ashamed, wishing now he had not done the thing or done it in another way, and full of mistrust of Moray and Maitland whom he had always hated.

"Do you think," she asked softly, "that my brother would ever be your friend? It was because of my marriage with you that I quarrelled with him, and Maitland followed him, and Morton is his right-hand man and he is hand-in-glove with Patrick Ruthven, and Lindsay is his brother-in-law. All this is his design and you have but been his cat's-paw if you did this."

"It is not true," he replied. "I have not done their will."

"Then you are not guilty of this cruel murder?"

"No!" he said, wishing to shine in her eyes. "No! Although certainly I know the rascals who--"

"Know them no more," she said, "for David is dead. Gone, like a puffed-out candle. But I am left to be saved, I and the child." As he stared at her she added: "We are prisoners, you and I, Harry. It is only because they are so sure of you that I was able to come down to your room. Every other way is guarded."

"Hush!" said the chamber-boy. "Oh, madame and my lord, there is someone talking at the entrance to the audience chamber where the Antony Standens keep watch."

The Queen, quick and soft, said instantly:

"It is someone from Moray. Be careful, for I can guess all they want to say to you. They come to warn you, perhaps to threaten. Go to them now, then return to me, return here, my love. Say nothing. Remember, I am concealed."

He stared at her, bewildered by her swiftness, alarmed by what she said, which he had an inkling was true. He sent the chamber-boy to find out who was this late visitor, and when John Taylor returned he said that Moray and Sir William Maitland begged a few words with the King's Grace.

The Queen smiled in sad triumph. This served her purpose very well. She was seldom lucky, but this was a fortunate chance. She looked at the little watch which hung at her waist. There was plenty of time!

"Return to me as quickly as you can," she said affectionately and with confidence, as if she and her husband were and always had been firm allies.

He was moved by her grace, her tired beauty, her trust in him, and encouraged, he went into the Chamber of Presence where the Antony Standens had lighted more candles and faced Lord Moray and Sir William Maitland, who greeted him in a casual and pleasant fashion.

As he told them roughly to be seated with a curtness that covered his uneasiness, his hatred and suspicion of them increased. He knew that he was slow-witted, that other men used this for their advantage. He was aware that he had no head for intrigue and was always outwitted. He hated these two who had tried from the first to prevent him from marrying the Queen. They, he was sure, were responsible for the fact that he could get no revenues settled on him, and though they had now promised him the Crown Matrimonial he did not believe that they would give it to him.

He respected, though half-consciously, his wife's intelligence, and her warnings rang in his ears as he listened to Moray, who spoke quite directly, without troubling to use much graciousness or tact, for, to his former dislike of the youth was a revulsion added by the

manner of the Italian's death.

"Sir William Maitland and I want to know from your own lips how we stand. You have aspired to the Crown Matrimonial and it has been promised to you. One who offended the dignity of all of us has been removed, but your mind as to the future is not clear to us."

"Why should I make it so?" demanded Henry Stewart, thrusting his hands into his belt and standing defiant and insolent before them.

"Because, sir, without us you are nothing," replied Moray smiling, "and with us you might become King indeed."

"Why do you come here so late and what do you demand of me?"

"We come late, sire," put in Sir William Maitland with his pleasant smile, "because recently events are hurried. We must have a settled policy."

"Damn all your policies!" said Henry Stewart, "I have done what I have done."

"I have a kingdom to govern," said Moray.

"You! That sounds to me rebel's talk."

"It matters little what it sounds to Your Grace. What we must know is, will you acquiesce in our policies? Will you reinstate our friends in their estates and honours? Will you protect the true Church and curb the Papists?"

"Will I, in short, be subservient to you in all you suggest?"

"That was my meaning," said Moray. "Look you, sir, in the Italian's room were found packets of letters addressed to foreigners, and

they were sent to their destination unlooked-upon, untampered with, but that correspondence is at an end. I stand for an alliance with England. You, as the King, must support me."

"And what of the Queen?" asked Henry Stewart pointedly.

"The Queen, sir, is your wife and you must see that she is a submissive one."

Moray spoke in an expressionless tone which seemed to the young man who listened to be full of malice.

The Queen then was right. These men only wanted to use him, to fool him. He was not fitted for kingship and they knew it. They wished to make him a figurehead. To try them further he asked:

"And what do I get for my obedience? The name of King, a pension, and leave to play my games in peace?"

"Sir," smiled Sir William Maitland, "that is very neatly put."

The young man whitened with fury to think that these two did not trouble to disguise their disdain.

"If I should go my own way and defy you both?" he asked, bluntly.

Moray did not reply except by a scarcely perceptible lift of the shoulders. But Sir William Maitland said:

"Sir, what would happen could scarcely be put into words, but if Your Grace should take the headlong course, why, he who gallops in the dark will soon fall."

"Warned and threatened!" said Henry Stewart grimly. "Well, gentlemen, no doubt I shall have the good sense to take your

advice."

He stood staring and smiling until they had taken their leave and the Antony Standens had closed the door on them. Then he went back into the bedchamber where the Queen waited.

During this interview in the outer room the Queen had sat with her watch in her hand, staring at the slow-moving hands. Everything depended upon him. If she could not win him over she was quite lost. She could see no hope anywhere.

When he returned to her she looked up from the watch and saw at once by his face that she had won. She drew a great breath and began, before he could speak, to go over her plans.

"So, you have got rid of them. They came to spy but they never guessed that I was here. In half an hour's time Arthur Erskine will be with horses beyond the church and we can escape, you and I. We should be at Dunbar to-night and from there we could call up the country. I had twelve thousand men before and more now perhaps, and we'll send them over the Border again, Harry."

"How will you manage this?" he asked. She had so much to bear, he thought. Truly some magic about her made her impossible to resist. He felt it as strongly now in a moment of danger and distress, as he had felt it when she had leaned to him from between the curtains of the bed at Stirling.

She told him simply of her trick with the midwife and Lady Reres and a boy (she did not name David's brother), who had taken a message to Bothwell and Huntly.

"Those two!" His quick jealousy flared up; she had favoured Bothwell far too much lately.

"Those two. There is no other beside Lord Bothwell who would dare to do this," she said. "He has arranged all, sent me a message, he says I can rely on him. He saved my mother more than once. Well, what are you going to do--send your chamberman after Moray and betray me? Then I shall die--I and the child will die, Harry, and where will you be among these men who hate you?"

He stood hesitating, miserable.

"Do you want me to betray them all?" he asked. "What danger shall I stand in if I do?"

"Betray!" She snatched at the word. "But if you did not organize this murder, whom have you to betray? You too have been wronged and outraged in my person. Come with me"--she took his hand boldly--"and I will make you a king indeed, not the puppet of these plotters."

Still he hesitated. Either way he was reluctant to move. He was bewildered, confused and exhausted. He longed to be free of Moray and Maitland, to play on them a trick like this would please him. But Bothwell--the worst man in Scotland. The Queen said quickly, watching his face:

"Lord Bothwell loves his young wife whom I gave him awhile ago, and it is for her sake that he takes pity on a woman."

This suggestion calmed the young man. Jane Gordon was twenty years old, a few weeks married. Perhaps it was stupid to be jealous of Bothwell.

"Why do you hesitate?" urged the Queen, hardly able to keep the agony out of her voice. "We cannot delay much longer, the horses will be there, it must be done now, now!"

"I am confused, I don't know which way to turn nor what to think. If only I could trust you!"

"What would make it clear to you, Harry? What would convince you?"

"If I thought you loved me--"

She rose and put her arms round his neck without hesitation, and with what seemed genuine passion, said:

"I do love you, Harry, that's why I want to help you escape from those who hate us both. Don't you understand?"

He put his arms around her and with a sigh caressed her.

"Well, then, I will come with you."

She quickly disengaged herself from his embrace, but kept hold of his hand and turned to John Taylor. "Run up the secret stairway quickly, find Mary Seaton, she is waiting for this signal. She is to come too. Remind her--the jewels, that she brings them all."

The boy obeyed. The Queen turned to her husband.

"Take your pistols, put on something dark. We must go out this way. You will have all the keys, I suppose? Through the church and the burial-ground. There they will be waiting."

John Taylor returned with Mary Seaton, who wore a long, dark cloak under which she half concealed a small lantern.

"Help me, Harry," said the Queen, "for I am very tired."

She took her husband's arm on which she leaned heavily, while the chamber-boy found the pistols and a black riding-cloak and gave

them to his master.

Cold and quiet, the ruined Abbey church of Holy Cross stood partly roofless to the sky. The Queen made her way through the deserted choir, past the empty stone window-frames and out into the burial-ground of the Kings of Scotland.

For a second she paused beside her father's tomb and, touching her husband's arm, asked where David was buried? He was shocked that she should speak of this and muttered that he did not know.

"Well," said the Queen, "that's the last time you'll hear of him from me, and as for his grave, no doubt wherever it be, one more splendid will lie beside him before the year is out."

"What do you mean by that?" he asked, holding her close, "what do you mean by that?"

"I thought of Moray," she whispered.

They passed on in the light of the small lantern which Mary Seaton held under an outspread, flap of her coat.

They would have a long start. Lady Argyll and Lady Reres and the midwife would keep the Queen's chambers as long as possible into the next day and the Antony Standens and John Taylor would keep those of the King.

"It is only twenty-five miles to Dunbar," said the Queen. A cold, strong wind blew on their faces and she drew it in eagerly as if it gave her strength. When they reached the postern the horses and three men, dark shapes in the shadows, waited.

The Queen looked over her shoulder--they had not been followed. Silent and dark the half-ruined church and the royal tombs lay behind

them. The palace was in darkness, too, except for a glimmer of light in her apartments. Moray, Maitland, and all their confederates slept peacefully, thinking they had their prey safe.

She peered round for Bothwell. The first two whom she saw were Arthur Erskine and Lord Huntly, and the third man was a little apart and seemed to be keeping watch.

"Quick, sir," Arthur Erskine whispered to the King, and "Quick, madame!" he touched Mary Seaton on the arm and took the lantern from her.

The King and Mary Seaton mounted but the Queen went up to the third man and gave him her hand.

"I have brought him," she whispered, "even though I did not think it could be done."

He pressed her fingers and assisted her carefully into the saddle behind Arthur Erskine.

Moray, turning in a heavy sleep, was roused by the sound of horses' hoofs trotting beneath his window. For a second he was startled, then he remembered he had told Lindsay to patrol the palace.

The Queen lay in Dunbar Castle in the first room that could be made ready. It was a wet and windy morning. The room was cold and a reluctant fire spluttered on the wide stone hearth.

Though she had ridden twenty-five miles through the night she had not slept. Prone with exhaustion, she lay on a mattress and pillows in the gown she had worn beneath the horseman's cloak in her headlong flight. As she lay there, staring into the fire, she asked for the King, and Mary Seaton replied that he had fallen into the first chair he could find and slept like a drunken man.

"He was always fond of his sleep," said the Queen, and asked for Bothwell and Huntly.

Mary Seaton said they had been out finding men to take the place of heralds to proclaim the Queen's will that her subjects should rally to her standard.

"I wonder if as many will come as did before," said the Queen faintly. "Ten thousand men! Five would be sufficient. I have a good cause, have I not, Mary?--my special servant slain in my presence, my house taken, myself held captive. How shall we punish these traitors?" She clasped her hands behind her head, then smiled.

"You rest, Mary. There is a couch in that inner room. I cannot sleep and perhaps shall not for many nights, but you, you are quite dropping with fatigue."

"Madame, I can endure it. I had some sleep last night before we left the Abbey. But you, madame, have not closed your eyes since--"

"I think I have died," said the Queen, closing her eyes, "and come to life again, if indeed I do live. How long ago was it when I sat at supper there? I wonder where, after all, they buried Florestan? Mary, if you do not mean to sleep, go downstairs and find Earl Bothwell and send him up here to me."

Mary Seaton did not like this errand and crossed herself as she always did at the mention of the Earl.

"Would it not be better for the Queen's Grace to receive the Earl presently?"

But the Queen shook her head on the pillows. She disdained all pretences, subterfuges, and ceremonies where either her heart, her

will, or her mind was concerned.

"I owe the man everything," she said. "I wish to thank him."

The Queen was still lying on the mattress by the fire, propped by pillows, when Bothwell came into her presence. By her side on the floor on which a Persian rug had been hastily unrolled, was a silk scarf knotted at the end, full of the jewels that Mary Seaton had brought with her from Holyrood, and over her knees lay a rug of red damask. The fire was burning more clearly and sent a steady heat into the chilly, half-furnished room.

The Queen smiled without moving and said:

"I owe you everything. Stand near the window where I can see you."

He obeyed her gravely and stood in the window-place looking down on her where she lay, with such reverence and tenderness that from his attitude she might have been throned before him.

Her senses almost failed her. Odd pictures floated in and out of her consciousness. The Italian cowering in the corner with upraised hands; Patrick Ruthven's face as he drank his wine; the disordered room and Florestan's fingers, like twigs, thrust up through the broken pastry; the midwife coming in and then the Lords kneeling on the floor on which were still little specks of blood; Moray commanding her in a hostile voice; Maitland, insinuating and gentle; the red ring on her finger; and the quick flight to the ruined church and the waiting horses, and this man...

"You saved me!" she said aloud, and her whole heart went out in gratitude. He had done more than save her body--he had saved her soul, or so she thought, for she might easily have died and gone to Hell during those black hours in Holyrood. But now she had a chance

to live again, and there would be time for repentance. She had been rescued from the depths of humiliation and she was Queen again.

In this man's presence, under his protection, she felt quite safe.

"What do you want?" she asked. "I know it seems now as if I could give you nothing, but you have made me a queen again and I shall give you your reward."

"I want nothing," he replied.

"No," she said, raising herself upon her elbows, "for you can take all you want."

She considered him attentively. She remembered all she had heard about him, none of which was to his credit. She had been told earnestly and by men who had advised her for her good, that Earl Bothwell had said terrible things about her. She did not know whether she believed this or not. It seemed not to matter. He might be compounded of all evil, but he had great courage, and there was no virtue that she admired more.

There was something, she thought, puzzling about his appearance. The man's looks were no clue to what he was. He was French-bred, elegant and cultured. He was tall, but not as tall as her husband. He was famed for great strength in sports and feats of arms, but appeared slighter than men like Lindsay and Ruthven. His features were distinctive, high cheekbones, a wide mouth, short aquiline nose, smooth-shaven cheeks, dark red hair, and eyes oddly light. He was the best dressed man that the Queen had seen since she had left France. She stirred on her mattress while he stood patient, awaiting her pleasure, grateful to him for his silence.

The Queen returned to Edinburgh with Earl Bothwell on one side and

her husband on the other, and she rode with three thousand men behind her. The confederate Lords who had planned the murder of Rizzio fled, seeing themselves betrayed by the King, realizing that the Queen had broken all the promises she had made to them the day after the murder.

They had made a desperate attempt to get these promises of an amnesty confirmed, sending Lord Sempill after her to Dunbar, but she had refused to deal with them.

The King, also, had washed his hands of his recent accomplices. Before the Privy Council and in the Proclamation that was read at Edinburgh Cross, pasted on the Tolbooth, and in other conspicuous parts of the city, he denied utterly that he had had any "art or part" in the murder of David Rizzio. This he swore on his honour as a prince.

The Queen neither reproached nor questioned him, but she kept on her person two bonds from this same crime which he had signed, and which the Lords, from their retreats, had sent her in their bitter anger against the King. Of these she said nothing.

For her Foreign Secretary she took Giuseppe Rizzio, although he was an inept boy of only eighteen years old. She had his brother's body disinterred from the common burial-ground and placed in the graveyard within the palace, which gave great offence to many. But she never mentioned his name nor gave any hint in her words or demeanour that she brooded over revenge or punishment.

She even allowed Moray to return to the court and bring with him Sir William Maitland. Her attitude seemed to be one of indifference when she was in her brother's company and she often went out with him and her husband, making a show before the people of stability and family harmony.

All this was for the sake of the child, the Prince of Scotland, who was to be born in Edinburgh Castle in June, and also because the Queen thought she might die in childbirth and therefore nothing really mattered any more. So she treated everything with an indifference that increased as the days went by.

But three bequests that she had made in her will when she thought she was going to die, showed that she had not forgotten the recent happenings.

To her husband she left the red ring with which he had married her. "The King my husband gave it to me," she wrote, "and I give it to him back again."

To Giuseppe Rizzio she left the tortoise of rubies and a cross of diamonds set in white enamel. "He is to give them to he whom he knows of," she had written, and the name that she had whispered in Giuseppe's ear was that of the priest. The jewels were to be sold and the money was to go in Masses for the soul of David who had died unshriven.

To Earl Bothwell, the man who had rescued her, she also left a gift. It was a mourning-ring, a skull with tears, in black and white.

She did not know what fancy prompted her to do this. The man--the image of him, and her interest in him, all hung in abeyance in her mind.

She had another whim she could not explain.

The night before the child was born she sent for Lady Bothwell, Jane Gordon, who had up to now been nothing but a name to her. Jane Gordon had to walk a long way through guard-rooms, ante-chambers, corridors, and rooms full of women, apothecaries,

leeches, and servants until she came to where the Queen sat by a window, staring down on the city.

A shaft of light fell through this window between the two women. Jane Gordon paused politely, and the Queen looked at her shrewdly.

She told her to come forward and the young woman advanced through the handsomely furnished room towards the Queen, veiled and draped to the throat in brocade and gauze, looking, despite Mary Seaton's care, ill and tired.

"Oh, Jane," sighed the Queen, "I have been thinking of you so often, dreaming of you, too, and I thought that I must see you."

"Why, madame, should you either dream or think of me?"

The Queen's tired eyes turned away. She had seen in a turn of the young girl's head and bare neck rising from the pleated ruff, a likeness to the head and neck of John Gordon as he knelt before the block, and she thought of how when she had first come to Scotland she had ridden against the House of Huntly and overthrown and ruined it, and how this girl's father had been stood up in an open coffin, a proclaimed traitor, while his armorial bearings had been torn before his dead face.

"I gave you to your husband, Jane, it is natural that I should wonder about your happiness."

"The Queen's Grace can scarcely be concerned about my happiness. It was my brother whom I obeyed in my marriage."

"Your brother!" said the Queen, almost timidly. "He has been a good servant to us."

"So was my father, madame," said Jane Gordon boldly, "and my

brother, John, and those others of my kin who perished in the north."

The Queen replied in a pleading voice:

"I do not want to speak of that nor even to think of it, Jane. If I was wrong I will make amends. Your brother shall have all his estates."

"I do not think so, madame," said the girl shrewdly, "while Lord Moray has your ear. Madame, have you anything more to say to me?"

The Queen was at a loss, but very curious about Bothwell's wife.

"Why should I want to know," she sighed. "What does it matter!"

She became wrapped up again with the thought of her own approaching death.

"Your House and mine were always in enmity," she whispered. Then, "You have a strange man for your husband."

"He is not strange to me," said Jane Gordon indifferently. "I bear him no ill-will."

"Not strange," repeated the Queen. "Ah, you mean he is civil and courteous."

"I mean that he loves me, madame."

When the Queen heard these words she knew that the girl had answered all her own speculations, that this was the reply to all those dreams and doubts which had teased her as she had sat in her enforced inactivity through the long days.

Well, she was probably going to die so it did not matter. Life seemed

to have ebbed within her. She looked drowsily at the girl who no doubt hated her, who accused her, of course, of the death of her father and her brothers--a vindictive family, the Huntlys, a heretic too, this stiff girl. Why had she allowed, even encouraged the marriage? Because of her eagerness to bind together the two men, Bothwell and Huntly, who might have been of service to her. How stale and far away all those tricks and shifts of politics seemed.

She took the rosary and the watch shaped like a skull from her waist and held them tight in her left hand on which was the red wedding-ring.

"Well, Jane Gordon," she said pleasantly, "forgive me that I brought you here for a whim."

The girl dropped her stiff curtsy and was gone, and the Queen remained in the cushioned window-place and gazed over the city below the rock on which the castle was built.

The Queen lay quiet in her bed, waiting for death. She lay between the curtains embroidered with lions and lilies and imagined she was in some monstrous, regal catafalque.

She was sorry for herself and her body which she had so loved and on which she had lavished such care, so soon to become dry and brown and ugly. She was sorry for whatever it was that had flamed so brightly in her mind, soul, or heart, that soon must be quenched. She thought with relief of Heaven.

The priest waited in the outer room and she could smell myrrh mingled with the apothecary's drugs and the dried violet root that she had told the midwife to sprinkle on the baby linen.

She was quite detached from her life, which seemed now brief and

rather foolish and without much meaning. She began to think, to distract herself, of the future.

Her death would, of course, be Moray's triumph. Whether the child lived or not he would do what he had always wanted to do--rule Scotland. Maitland, elegant, subtle, wise, would be always at his right hand, no, at his left--Maitland at his left half-secretly, and Morton the big bully, at his right.

The Queen sighed. She felt a quiet affection for the country she was about to leave. It was really like a dark jewel, her barbaric northern kingdom. She remembered the feel of the dry, springy heather beneath her feet and the dizziness she had felt when skirting one of these hills and looking down, a tumbling water-fall and the loneliness of those remote valleys, above which the shadows of moving clouds scudded like ghosts.

Still! Moray was her half-brother, her father's son. Perhaps he knew what they wanted, perhaps he would be able to rule them. She thought of her husband. What would his fate be when she was gone? Moray would sweep him away like a dead leaf falling from the tree in autumn, he and his greedy, anxious father and their followers. The Hamiltons would help too, they would be over the Border with what plunder they could take, and David would be avenged.

She smiled sadly, remembering Stirling and what she had hoped from Henry Stewart, how he was to be her protection and light against her enemies. Ah, well! it had all gone wrong. She had wanted his beauty and his strength and his honesty. She had thought that she could arm and adorn herself with these qualities and virtues as she could arm herself with the corselets of linked steel, and adorn herself with strings of jewels.

But that was over; he was nothing to her any more. She had wanted

what Rizzio had to give, too--his quickness, his cleverness, and all that intense passion which she delighted to tantalize, which she had used to punish another. She had had that, too, and that was over.

Her thoughts went further back to John Gordon and Chastelard. All over, and she left none the richer. There was only one bridegroom left for her and she did not love him.

She was not in the least afraid. But if she had lived who would have been her next choice? She distracted herself from the growing pain that was overcoming her by turning that question over in her mind. Of all the men who surrounded her, who had the most to give her--Earl Bothwell? Was not he the man who had set her up higher than she had ever been, who might set her higher yet?

Pain encompassed her. She thought of men on the rack, of women chained to the stake, of Gordon and the Frenchman kneeling at the block and she pressed her lips together so as not to cry out.

"If David had been alive I would have made him play some music for me in the outer chamber."

She sat up with an effort and pulled aside the curtains stiff with the yellow lions.

"Mary Seaton! Tell them to come to me now. Let the priest be ready outside the door."

She tried to sing a French song that Ronsard had taught her about the girl on whose grave was poured a basket of roses and a vase of milk, and she forced herself to smile as the creeping agony seemed to break her body in two.

Mary Seaton, trembling with terror, came to the bed and the Queen stretched out a cold hand and took the girl's fingers.

"Mary, when I am dead, don't let them forget that I am twice a queen. I want the lilies as well as the lions." The midwife, important, anxious, entered the room with the French girls; in the doorway the priest and his assistant knelt regardless of the sneers of the Protestant Lords crowding in the ante-chamber.

The Queen turned into her pillows and bit at her wrist to keep herself from crying out, and began to fight for her life and that of the heir of Scotland. She laughed to stifle her moans, and because these fools were kneeling to receive as their king one whom they secretly believed to be the child of the servant whom they had trampled to death.

Moray heard with deep satisfaction that the child was a son and that the Queen lived. He saw in this fact an assurance of his future policy and his future power. Neither the Queen nor her husband was of as much importance in Moray's eyes as this child. He must be a Protestant, in his reign all trace of Catholicism must be swept out of Scotland and he, Moray, would rule without resistance.

There was, of course, the Lennox faction to reckon with, who considered this birth their personal triumph, but Moray did not make much of that. The undoing of these pretenders to the power, and Lennox's own ambitions could be left to the folly of Henry Stewart.

There were the hordes of Hamiltons, cruel and unscrupulous, but Moray did not fear them either.

Then, the Queen herself--his calculations stopped there. He had stopped thinking of her, for he too had believed that she might die, so plainly had he read her actions of late. She had been most civil to him, her brother, most civil to her bewildered husband; she had played the prudent wife, the decorous Queen. She had never

mentioned David nor spoken of recalling the Lords who had been banished for his murder. She, too, had suspended everything, held her hand--a woman waiting for her child.

Moray could understand her motives. Until Scotland's heir was born she could risk no scandal, no quarrels. With none of her own French relatives to support her, husband and brother must do so. In public she had deferred to her husband, she had made him extraordinary gifts, favours and presents had gone to old Lennox. To himself, Moray, she had been more than generous.

But he was not deceived. Once the child was born and she was free of the burden of her responsibility she would show her hand again. Moray had been present at her interview with her husband when the Prince was a day old and he remarked them both, very curiously.

The Queen had been so faint and wan, tormented by such a deep cough, so near death, that it had not appeared possible that there was any harm or guile in her.

She told the two men, husband and brother, how sorely she had been handled, how nearly she had died, and Moray had shuddered and felt the tears in his own eyes, but the young King had stood stubborn and obstinate, carefully looking at her, shifting from foot to foot.

Then she had taken the child, stiff in his swaddling clothes, and held it out between the curtains and called her God to witness that it was his, Henry Stewart's, and none other.

Moray winced that she should have come to this for there were many people in the chamber who could hear the declaration. The King, flushed and without replying, stooped awkwardly and kissed the child. But the Queen had not been satisfied. Goaded by his silence

she had taken the infant and lifting the veil from its face, said in a trembling voice:

"Here, I profess to God, and I shall answer to Him on the great Day of Judgment, is your son and no other man's son. All here bear witness!" And then, as the King did not speak she added: "He is so much your son that I fear it will be the worse for him hereafter."

At this remark he had stirred slightly, the Queen had looked past him at Moray, saying:

"Here is the Prince who shall unite Scotland and England."

"Why, madame, shall he succeed before Your Majesty and his father?"

"Alas," she had sighed, "his father has broken to me." Then the King, not shifting his place nor raising his head, muttered:

"Sweet madame, is this your promise you made to forgive and forget all?"

"Ah," said she, "I have forgiven all, but never will forget."

She had handed the child back to the nurse and sank back on to the pillows.

"If one of those sword thrusts had gone awry what would have become of him and me, or what estate would you have been in? God only knows, but we may suspect."

The Queen had smiled at Moray over her husband's shoulder and then she said: "Let all go." The King, without further word to her or comment on the child, had left the bedchamber.

Moray smiled to think that she had, despite his suspicions and sullenness, had her will with Henry Stewart. He had done what she wished, he had written to the King of France, and to her uncle, the Cardinal of Guise, asking them to be sponsors to the child. Moray believed that this tacit acknowledgement of paternity was the last service that the Queen would ever require from her husband.

He puzzled a little as to what would become of the slighted, useless young man who had offended everyone, who was an enemy of his wife, who had outraged the nobility of Scotland by urging them on to the murder of Rizzio and then betraying them. Twenty years old and already in so desperate a plight! The Queen's husband, too, and not to be rid of so easily.

Moray's thoughts travelled to the man whom the Queen had lately seemed to hold most in favour--Earl Bothwell, his own especial enemy, a man whom he detested, and a little feared as far as it was in his nature to fear anybody. He was now on the Border, the Governorship of which he had obtained against the wish of the King, who wanted that post for his father.

Moray pondered, his fingers fumbling a piece of unicorn horn kept on his desk as an antidote to disease. Bothwell must be got rid of too--Bothwell and Henry Stewart, by some means, must be destroyed. Maitland might be able to suggest some plan that would involve neither of them. Unless--there was one way by which both of them might be rendered harmless. The Queen might be forced to pretend a reconciliation with her husband, to live with him quietly and dutifully, and Bothwell might be banished again to England or to France. If she would consent to that, all might be very simple. He tingled with impatience for the day when she would be well enough for him to sound her intentions.

Moray went up to the castle where the Queen had given him rooms,

during his residence, for his private use. He intended to probe her mind and was confident of his errand. She had lately been civil towards him, admitting him to her presence when she refused Huntly and other friends of Bothwell. She had spoken to him gravely of Scottish affairs, she had even confided to him that she had money from the Pope, and said that all should be used for peaceful purposes, in making amities among her people. She had told him also, with what appeared to be a pathetic sincerity, that she mistrusted her husband, who, she thought, was making plots against her with his family and with such of the nobles as would listen to him. She said that he went in constant fear that she might recall Maitland, or some of the nobles implicated in the murder of David. He particularly dreaded Morton and the other Douglasses. She did not say that she knew the reason of his fear—the, fact that he had been the instigator of the murder and then betrayed his accomplices, but Moray could read that knowledge in her eyes.

So Moray had begun to feel sure of her and had resolved that on this meeting he would insist at least on the recall of Maitland and his return to the Secretaryship. Quite soon he meant to insist on the return of Morton and the other Douglasses. If that meant the end of the King he did not think the Queen would grieve overmuch.

But when Moray inquired for the Queen he found that she had gone. His amazement was extreme and was succeeded by a deep anger, not so much against her duplicity as against his own foolishness in trusting her. How many instances he had had of her inconstancy and fickleness, yet she had been able to deceive him again!

She had gone to Alloa, Lord Mar's castle, and she had not even taken Mary Seaton with her but had gone secretly. Her escort had been the new body of harquebusiers, and she had taken with her Lady Reres, Mary Beaton's aunt, sister of a witch and Bothwell's ex-mistress.

Moray heard this in anger and self-reproach. This woman's caprices were always overthrowing his careful plans. He saw Earl Bothwell as becoming suddenly important, and this filled him with fury, for of all the hates in Scotland then, and there were many, there was not a hate more intense than that of Moray for Bothwell, not even the hatred of the King for Morton.

Moray went upstairs into the Queen's chambers which were being dismantled, the tapestries taken down from the walls, the furniture unhung from the beds, chairs and cushions stacked up.

He found Mary Seaton helping to take down the winged altar-piece, the statues and arras from the oratory, and called her away impatiently. He questioned her closely as to the Queen's motives for this behaviour.

"Why, she has run away before her month was up, quicker than any common woman. Had she not hesitated to leave her child?"

"She does not love him," said Mary Seaton loyally. "What does she know of him, why should she care about him? She said he looked like Florestan but was not so clean nor so clever, and it is true enough."

It instantly occurred to Moray that if the Queen proved an indifferent mother that might help his game--the child was more useful than she was, it would suit him to keep them apart.

When the Queen escaped from Edinburgh Castle, from all the paraphernalia of childbirth, the dark rooms, the priests and apothecaries, the women and servants, the medicines and ceremonies, the smells of incense and drugs and the wax candles, she felt like a new being. She shook off the castle, the city, the

Abbey, the child, Moray, her husband, Lennox, like so much dust from the hem of her robe.

Lady Reres was good company, it was agreeable to be with her after the pious prudery of Mary Seaton, the inane chatter of the French girls, and the gossip of the midwife. Lady Reres knew a great many things that it amused the Queen to hear. She had diverting tales of Earl Bothwell, she had been his lover once. She knew many secrets of magic, too, for her sister was a witch, the enchanted Lady of Braxholme, niece of the murdered Cardinal Beaton. She could tell tales of this uncle who, when the Queen was a little child, had been dragged out of his chamber at his castle of Saint Andrews and butchered by the Protestants, urged on by John Knox.

The Queen walked the sands at Alloa, the wind in her hair and listened to the fat woman by her side. The refrain of her pleasant, humorous talk was always Bothwell. Bothwell was the man, and he alone. Didn't the Queen's Grace see that? There was no one like him.

Look at the rescue from Holyrood. Who else had been able to think of that? He was powerful, too, he had the whole of the Border, Liddesdale, and other counties that touched on England as well as lands in Lothian. And, through the Huntlys he had the north. The Gordons were powerful, Lady Reres said, as powerful as the Douglas and the Hamiltons put together, if need be.

"What need?" asked the Queen, throwing back her head and laughing.

"He knows it," replied the woman with a wink as she laboured over the salt-encrusted sands, and she continued to talk of Bothwell. Much of what she said the Queen knew, but she listened patiently all the same. The Hepburns, now, was it not an ancient and a noble name?

James Hepburn! He was not yet thirty years old, no, twenty-eight on his last name-day, yet there was nothing he had not accomplished.

As a boy he had been in the field—"fighting for your mother, madame, as Your Grace well knows. Ay, at Kelso, when everyone had forsaken her he threw himself across the Border and drove the English back."

"Well, well, we have been grateful."

The Queen paused, still smiling. The day was so beautiful. The little waves of the Firth of Forth fell one over another while the sea-birds, white and grey, dipped away.

The stout woman paused, out of breath, with her hands stuck on her hips, and stared across the gleaming water. Then she went on about Bothwell. The Queen listened, half-laughing.

He had such a wonderful library of magic books; it was quite true that he knew all about spells and potions.

"He can tie the four winds in a kerchief," said the Queen smiling, "and set witches on a broomstick to stir the heavens to storm. It is as well to have such a man for a servant."

She asked Lady Reres in a friendly fashion if it were true what was said about Janet Beaton, the wizard lady of Braxholme. Could she really do all these tricks? Had she been married to Bothwell, and what about the Danish girl?

Lady Reres laughed till she shook. What did any of that matter, old tales, all of them!

"But," she added, "he is a man whom few women, perhaps only one woman, could resist." The Queen thought of Jane Gordon. "He loves

his wife?" she remarked.

The elder woman's gusty laughter rang loud in the still air, and the Queen seemed pleased at the note of scorn in it.

"He despises her, madame, he despises all of them! There is only one creature who would satisfy him--"

The Queen did not check this impudence. She took off her flat, stout leather shoes and ran along the sands, the wind in her thin blue dress, in her thick hair.

That night her spirits rose so high there were some of Lord Mar's household said that the Lady of Braxholme's sister had bewitched the Queen.

The King poured out his misery to his father.

"What does she mean to do? I have no friends, not one. I do not know which to dread the most--Bothwell, Moray, Maitland, or the banished Lords. If she could call those back--"

"She will not," replied Lennox. "Is it not more to her interests than to yours to keep them away? She must loathe them."

"She loathes me more deeply. She only played with me till the child was born; she wanted me to acknowledge it and I did."

"You would have been a thrice damned fool if you had not," snarled Lennox. "Is not that our best hold on her? Would it suit our plans to have you the wittol husband?" Then in his anger and disgust he began to abuse his son. "You should not have betrayed them. They are too powerful, there are too many of them, you signed those bonds and then betrayed them. What is there about this woman that she could persuade you to that?"

"She might have been right," replied the King doggedly, trying to cover up his disastrous mistake. "She said, that night at Holyrood, they meant to have me next. Perhaps it was true."

"Perhaps it was true," sneered his father. "They mean certainly to have you now. All this clatter about the slaying of an Italian scullion! It should have been Moray whom you'd taken, ay, and Maitland with him."

"I thought of it," said the King sullenly, "but I had no one to help me. He is too powerful, he'd leave too many behind to avenge him. It is difficult to come at--murder, I mean--I never was taught those tricks. Besides, she protects him. Several times lately I have found him in her presence. I told her once I'd endure no more of it. It is David over again--I am turned away while he is closeted with her. I said I'd break his neck and she warned him--he came and told me that she had. Don't you see that if anything like that was attempted and discovered it would be an excuse for putting us both out of the kingdom? Though God knows, that would hardly break my heart. I loathe Scotland."

Softly, and with utter bitterness, Lennox began to abuse the Queen, stinging her name with his tongue, using the foulest words he could think of to besmirch her, doing this deliberately and viciously.

"She is all that," assented the young husband.

"Yet, when she chooses," cried his father bitterly, "she can have her will of you, you fool. What position have you got yourself into? You have the name of King but none of the respect, you are ringed round with enemies. You have neither power, money, nor retinue. And what can I do? We have everyone against us!"

He began to curse Moray as the devil incarnate, and Maitland as a

keeper of an outpost of Hell. The King listened with despair to his father's railings. He was no match for any of the combinations formed against him in the court, and knew it. He bitterly regretted his treacheries, for he knew that his accomplices had sent the Queen the two bonds he had signed for Rizzio's murder. Once, when she had allowed him into her chamber she had opened a jewel case lined with blue satin and he had seen lying there the red enamel wedding-ring and the two bonds. She had looked up at him and smiled, then closed the case, locked it, and given it to Mary Seaton, to guard well, as she said.

Yes, he had betrayed his accomplices, and because of that they were ruined and banished, and she had betrayed him, making him leave Holyrood with her under the pretence that she loved him. How could he have believed that? How could he have allowed her a second time to persuade him?

"She makes use of me again and again," he muttered.

"Ay, and will do so," said his father, looking at him in contempt, "as long as there's breath in her body. What of this Bothwell, what of this ruffian she now makes much of?"

"I think he is my friend," said the young King slowly. "He, too, hates Moray. He said he would stand by me to remove him."

But Lennox spat out abuse of Bothwell.

"Believe nothing of such a rascal's promises or friendship. And look to him and the Queen," he added, "look to him and the Queen. She puts him above everyone, he is all in all at court. Your friend!--he'd slit your throat for a nudge from her. He has butchered more men already than any dare tell."

The King was wretched, overwhelmed by a fit of despair. He could see no help ahead; he really believed his position was so desperate that there was nothing for it but to leave Scotland, and he turned over in his unhappy mind how he might revenge himself on all of them and shame the Queen, leave her at a loss by withdrawing from the kingdom where he had met nothing but humiliation, perils, and pain.

At the end of the summer the King and Queen hunted in Meggatdale. They did not have much sport for the poachers had been among the deer on the wide moors. Nor was there any freedom and mirth in their conversation. They only met in public, and each kept spies on the other.

Constantly in their company were Lord Moray and Earl Bothwell. Lennox had bid his son be patient and go cautiously, but the sunny, empty, hostile days galled the unhappy youth.

It seemed to him that everyone was laughing at him, and when they returned to Edinburgh and the Queen suddenly gave him rich presents, rounds of brocade and lengths of cypress, silver-knobbed harness for a horse and the bed from Stirling, it seemed to him she laughed the loudest of all.

By early autumn the Queen had brought back Sir William Maitland, and made him the Secretary of State again. Poor Giuseppe, she declared, she only kept for her small, private correspondence in French and Italian.

She bade Maitland be amiable to Bothwell with whom he had long been at odds. She made Moray and Bothwell clasp hands and speak to each other civilly, and she gave them all to understand that they were equally her friends if they would band themselves against her enemies. They had no need to ask what enemies they were, they knew she meant Lennox and his son.

The King sulked at Stirling, and Lennox wrote a letter to the Queen, telling her it was their intention to leave the country and that they had a vessel ready to take them and their followers abroad.

As the Queen stood staring at this letter, the King himself rode up through the pale, October weather and demanded to see her, but when he heard that Moray and Bothwell were in her company he would not go up.

Thereupon the Queen, smiling, sent these Lords away and went down to meet him where he stood reluctant and hesitant, on the grand staircase.

When she took his hand he said nothing, though her greetings were ready and civil. He followed her upstairs to the room which he had not entered since the night the body of the Italian had been dragged through it.

She shut the door on everyone, even Mary Seaton. Then, very earnestly, she demanded of her husband his reasons for wishing to leave her and depart from the country. But though she kept him with her all night she could get nothing from him, for he put aside her wiles and entreaties and her gentle threats. "Ah," she said, "I perceive you are indeed broken with me."

She spoke to him of the child, a flourishing prince likely to be of great importance in Europe, but he said nothing, only remained sitting heavily in the chair at the foot of her bed. All night she pleaded in vain, until at break of day she lay her down in her clothes and slept from sheer weariness.

When she got up soon after, her agitation disturbing rest, she found him asleep in his riding-habit in the chair. She roused him and took him down to the Council Chamber where the French Ambassador

was and there before them all she implored him to declare his grief and what he might have against her. The Lords seconded this request, calling her a wise and virtuous princess, and asked why he would leave her and this rich kingdom.

So they goaded and baited this young man, who knew they were all banded against him. He had neither authority nor respect. He realized that the woman who had betrayed him before would do so again.

Twice he made as if to speak and turned towards his wife. But each time he looked round at those smiling, hostile faces and was silent.

At last he rose up impatiently, refusing to explain himself, saying to the Queen "Adieu, madame!" and to the Lords "Adieu, gentlemen, this is the last of me." Then he walked out of Holyrood and rode away with no one following him but his page boy.

That evening Moray and Maitland drew all the Lords in a bond against Henry Stewart as he had drawn them in a bond against David Rizzio. It was very secretly and carefully done, and Moray, with many smiles and courtesies, singled out from his noble friends the Earl Bothwell to be the leader in this enterprise, thinking to himself that the thing was simple--Henry Stewart had been used to destroy Rizzio, and by that crime himself; Earl Bothwell could be used to destroy Henry Stewart and by that crime himself. In this deed, as in that, he, James Stewart, Earl Moray, and Maitland, his pliant friend, would stand aside and receive no blame nor take any responsibility.

When all were gone Maitland asked his friend: "And the Queen?"

"Ay," said Moray heavily, "all comes round to the Queen. But she is not so important now there is a prince; the weight of the crown is eased about her brows, Maitland."

"Yet she lives," said the Secretary of State softly, "and I, for one, would not care to harm her."

"Who spoke of harm?"

"Shall she know, need she know?" asked Maitland. "She truly loathes him."

"What does it matter if she loathes or favours him," replied Moray, as if Henry Stewart were already dead.

"What shall we do with her next lover?"

"Bothwell?" whispered Moray with his chin on his breast. "You see then how things go, Maitland."

"He is not perhaps her lover yet," said the Secretary delicately.

"I don't know," said Moray, with a bleak look. "I have tried to prevent it. How can one tell, she is so brittle and so clever. And he has every art--But it will not be difficult to be rid of him."

"And yet one needs," smiled the Secretary, "some finesse. We do not now discuss an Italian groom but a prince, and a king. Bothwell, too, might be a match for us."

"No. He is reckless, blinded by ambition. A man of straw. Leave him to destroy himself."

Lady Reres wondered about the Queen. She had become very familiar with her, replacing Mary Seaton and the French girls as well as the two Maries--Mary Livingstone and Mary Fleming, who had married--but she was still baffled by her.

Often she would tell her stories and ask her questions. But the Queen

would only smile, neither offended nor surprised, admitting nothing, only amused. Lady Reres saw that the Queen did not live with her husband. Under one excuse or another they were always apart, and the fat woman with her quick eye and ear for gossip, saw that the Queen tolerated the King's enemies, but she could not get her to commit herself that she was one of them. Then the new favourite had tried to insinuate herself into the Queen's confidence on the question of the Italian boys.

What had really happened with David? What had been precisely the order of events on that appalling night in Holyrood? But the Queen had been silent.

Then there was Giuseppe. What of him?

He went about his business and the Queen flung him money and gifts as she flung her dogs and her birds sugar and titbits.

Lady Reres praised Bothwell, and the Queen liked to listen, but how far would Bothwell rise in court? Everyone in the court and city looked askance at the stout woman with the bad reputation who was supposed to know so many secret ways of accomplishing evil. She was to help the Queen and Bothwell as Rizzio had been supposed to help the Queen and Henry Stewart.

It was known everywhere that the King in a fit of fury had told Lord Moray that the Queen had been his mistress before she had been his wife. Had not Lady Reres herself repeated the rumour, to the Queen, and seen no change in her expression?

Was the Queen, after all, a chaste, discreet woman? Nothing seemed to shame her, yet she seemed to live like a nun.

Baffled and angered, the woman said at length directly: "You know,

madame, that it is whispered everywhere that Earl Bothwell tries to win you with black arts."

The Queen lay on the reposing-bed in the Exchequer House. Lady Reres, walking heavily up and down, began to make jokes about love and honour and virtue. The Queen smiled, slowly waving a fan of black feathers to and fro.

Earl Bothwell and his wife lodged in David Chalmers's house that was at the end of the passage adjoining the Exchequer House.

Lady Reres said suddenly, standing in front of the Queen and sticking her hands on her hips:

"Perhaps now he is casting spells and incantations. You do not know what he can do with drugs and potions."

The Queen laughed, and there was a note of mocking in her laughter.

"Do you think I am here for anyone to take?" she asked indifferently. "Do you know what my Lord Moray does? He plans all into a combination against my husband."

"How does that affect Your Grace?" asked Lady Reres, stopping in front of her.

"I do not know," replied the Queen steadily. "How can they free me of him? I see no way out. If they were to find some quibble in our marriage and dissolve it there would be a smirch upon the child. And if he were to go abroad as he threatens, it would be a great scandal. If he were to go to England, Elizabeth Tudor might help him to cause discord in Scotland.

"And what for me?" she added, "what for me?"

"I'll fetch Earl Bothwell," nodded Lady Reres, and walked, fat and ungainly, out of the room.

"Can he give me good advice?" whispered the Queen after her, but Lady Reres did not reply.

She told Margaret Carwood, who was in her pay, to let no one into the Exchequer House where the Queen rested during the humid autumn afternoon, and she went to David Chalmers's mansion where Earl Bothwell was playing chess with his wife.

He had his own furnishings in this house and the autumn sunlight struck on the backs of shelves of books of magic.

Jane Gordon looked up when she saw the old woman on the threshold and she pursed her lips. She seemed both reserved and dispirited. She overturned the pieces on the board, mingled them together, knights, bishops, pawns, while her husband's pale bright eyes stared menacingly at the fat woman whom he had paid so well and who had so far done so little for him.

Lady Reres spoke and her voice was wheezy from her haste.

"Come, there some's important business for you. Come with me."

Without looking at his wife, who continued to gaze at the chess pieces, Earl Bothwell left David Chalmers's house.

"There are spies everywhere," grumbled the fat woman, as the door closed behind them on Jane Gordon sitting alone, "and I swear I do not know her mind. But she's alone now, and if you were to go down boldly and say you have some business--"

The man nodded gravely.

"I'll go in and talk to your wife," continued Lady Reres.

"No. She detests you."

"Well, I thought for that reason--"

"No!" said Bothwell again, and this time the woman was silent. She returned to the Exchequer House, and waddled to the linen closet where the French girls and Margaret Carwood were putting coifs, veils and linen napkins into presses and delicately setting gauze ruffs and collars on to fine tourets of gold wire hung with jewels.

Earl Bothwell entered the Exchequer House by another way from that Lady Reres had taken--a private passage from David Chalmers's mansion led directly to the Queen's apartments. He walked in like a master, not arrogantly but casually.

The Queen looked up and saw him coming. This was the man--how could she ever have mistaken the others for him, with his gaiety and brilliance, above all his audacity?

He came to the reposing-bed and stood looking down at her. She said under her breath without moving, smiling directly into his strange, light eyes with a meaning that had nothing to do with her words: "There are Lennox spies everywhere and Moray's too. Trust no one."

"Madame, I am your friend, if all the world were in arms against you."

"You climb high," whispered the Queen, and he replied, emphatically:

"Where you wish, as you wish."

She seemed to reflect a moment, then she put her hand under one of the cushions and drew out a key.

"It is that," she said, "of the newel staircase which leads through the King's rooms to mine. But he is not there."

As she spoke, musing, she was picturing Patrick Ruthyen, and the armed men and her husband with his arm round her waist, the overturned supper-board, that night of horror and humiliation. She saw the body of the trampled monkey and what she had done afterwards, how she had gone down and cringed to him, and how this man standing before her now had saved her.

"There are spies and bravos everywhere, you know—I'll never be free.

"Spies!" she repeated under her breath, as one of her servants entered the room under pretext of closing the windows because the evening air was cold. When the woman had gone he said, still standing away from the Queen:

"The King's spies?"

"He is no king unless I choose. Call him Lord Darnley. I am weary of him."

"He says that he will leave the country."

"He must not. Come nearer."

She enjoyed deception, yet she could be very reckless and sometimes took no trouble at all to avoid compromising herself. This suited the man: he wanted her, by any and every means, delivered into his hands. His conquest of her had been so easy that sometimes he had to remind himself sharply that this was a queen, who might give him a crown. Since her escape from Edinburgh Castle after the birth of the Prince they had been lovers and he had not had to tell her that he loved her; they had come together like the

magnet and the steel. Without words, almost without glances, he had devised her complete surrender. Setting her above all hypocrisies, conventions, and petty fears, he had treated her as a creature whose right to all the delights of love was natural and unquestioned. The Queen had been deeply grateful for this. After the shamefaced, fluctuating passion of Henry Stewart, and the half-timid, half-insolent devotion of David, she rejoiced in this man who knew neither shame nor remorse, neither regret nor fear, who spared her protestations of fidelity, who neither offered nor exacted explanations.

He had gained an unlimited power over her. Sometimes she believed that he had really enchanted her, bound her to him with magic potions and spells. Sometimes she sensed that the logical outcome of the indulgence of this intense, heartless, and wayward passion must be tragic; sometimes she felt, with a cold self-realization, the steady deepening of her own corruption under the influence of this dazzling lover.

But she was happy, and content to leave her destiny in the hands of the man who pleased her better than any man had yet.

Quite at his ease, he waited her will. He did not fear either the spies of the King or the bravi of Moray. His courage was of such an arrogant quality that he felt himself to be invulnerable.

He considered the Queen a little curiously; it had cost him so little to win her that sometimes, despite his fearless self-assurance, he wondered what possible treachery might lurk behind her implacable frivolity. He, too, had spies on her; the Frenchman, Nicolas Hubert, nicknamed Paris, who had been in her service and was now in his, daily brought him news of her behaviour. So far he had learned nothing to his disadvantage--she was all his...but he watched and was very wary. Modern as she appeared, she might yet cherish some romantic illusions that would be to the advantage of another

man.

The Queen spoke. "Come to me to-night." She pulled at his ruffled sleeve. "He must, somehow, be dealt with." Her face was puckered with anxiety. "But I must not be involved, do you understand? Moray and Maitland, now, look out for them--"

He touched her cheek kindly.

"Leave all to me."

"But there is need for haste, and care. Come to-night."

She paused, allowing her thoughts to dwell with pleasure over those secret visits: every time that he came up the newel stairs through the empty apartments of the King, she felt David avenged. It was dangerous, and she liked that, too. They had only two confidants--Mary Seaton, with her inviolable fidelity, and Paris, the debauched boy whom Bothwell had brought from the French Court.

Encompassed by danger, yet with a sense of security, the Queen loved to lie in her lover's arms. She felt as if his strength passed to her, making her invulnerable.

"It is perhaps not wise for me to come?"

"But we cannot speak here. And he is in Glasgow."

"I am not free. I have to account for my comings and goings."

"To Jane Gordon?" The Queen whispered the name scornfully.

"And to her brother, Huntly."

"A false race--you are tied to a false race, like I am--"

He smiled to hear her speak of falsehood--as if she knew what sincerity was!

She drew him closer to her in the dusk.

"If I am not saved now, I am lost indeed. We must be rid of--them. You understand? And soon. He has almost denied one child. This time--"

They began whispering, closely, in the dusk.

Lady Reres, triumphant in an outer room where she chattered with the French girls, inwardly congratulated herself that she had at last put the Queen into the power of Earl Bothwell. Even she had been deceived by the adroit methods of the man who had long despised and dispensed with her services.

While the man and woman whispered in the deepening shadows of the Exchequer House in the castle on the hill, Earl Moray put safely in a secret place a green casket that contained the bond uniting all the nobles against the Queen's husband.

The King lay sick in Glasgow, in his father's stronghold, where he had fled for protection against his enemies. Only in this place in all Scotland could he be safe, and even there he awoke sometimes in the middle of the night, trembling, and calling for his servant to come and sit by him.

So many enemies! The Queen had recalled all those whom he had offended--the Douglasses, Morton, Atholl, Argyll, Lindsay, and Maitland, all of whom were surely upon his track. Never would they forgive that betrayal, never.

His mind, plagued and tortured by sickness, made dreadful pictures

of recent events--at the christening, how he had been flouted, shut away in his own room, so desperate that he had cringed to her for a little favour, for a smile, a place of honour. But no, she had refused him everything.

There had been masques, banquets, festivals, and a great papal ceremony, and he, a son of the true Faith, had had to cower in his room, alone except for his English servants, while Earl Bothwell had been the master of the ceremony and helped to entertain the guests.

Then, as an excuse, no doubt, to get away from him, she had ridden to the Border, holding her sessions in the frontier towns, and at Jedburgh had fallen so ill that they thought that she would die. But she had not sent for him.

When she had recovered again, and been able to mount a horse, what had this foolish, indomitable, exasperating woman done?

She had ridden to Hermitage Castle where Earl Bothwell lay wounded from a Border scuffle. Sixty miles in one day she had ridden--there and back, to get a sight of him, so it seemed. She had, of course, been ill again from fatigue and those about her blamed him, her wretched husband, as the cause of her distress. She seemed to him to squander everything, even her own life.

Maitland was with her, and Moray. What did they plan? They were often closeted together. He had spies in her household and the news they sent him was bad. She spoke of him harshly. She blamed him for all her misfortunes. She drew all those about her into a clique against him. The young man saw the future as bleak and terrible; if his illness had not stricken him down he would have fled the country, taken a ship with a few followers and gone anywhere to be free of this accursed Scotland.

Lennox suddenly burst into the room. The Queen had arrived in Glasgow without warning.

Henry Stewart could not speak for astonishment; he lay staring from his pillows. Lennox spoke hurriedly. He had been ill himself and could hardly hold himself upright.

"It is true she gave notice of her intention, but I did not think she meant it. She has ridden from Edinburgh in this winter weather to see you, to make a reconciliation, she says, yet her mood I do not think is good. She has Livingstone, Lady Reres, and some others with her. She says if you would not come to her she must come to you. Too great a lady to be fastidious, eh?"

"She comes to flatter," whispered the young man from the bed, his face was surly and unresponsive. "She wants something from me. What?"

"She can do no harm here," said Lennox heavily. "Thomas Crawford went out to speak to her and she was pleasant enough. Who knows? she may have decided this is the only way--a reconciliation, eh? While you're here, at least you're safe, she has only a small escort. But if you like I will tell her you are too sick and cannot see her."

Henry Stewart did not reply. He found to his astonishment that the mere mention of his wife's name and the thought that she was in the same city with him had dissipated some of his nightmares. Supposing she was to see him after all, be good to him again? But he hardened his heart and tried to remember all her faults and offences and to conjure up an unlikeable image of her. He was angry, too, because he looked ugly, covered with sores, results of the illness that had struck him down. He had never had anything that pleased her save his good looks, and they had gone.

At first he said "I will not see her," then, "Let her come," then again, "No!"

At last, Lennox, who indeed himself scarcely knew what to do, persuaded him that the Queen should visit him. The old man reminded his son that twice she had offered to send her physician, but to this Henry replied sullenly that no doubt she had her own interests to serve by that. There could be nothing good in this visit, they had been estranged too long. She had released all his enemies, she had openly favoured Bothwell and Moray. Yet he would see her from curiosity, from longing, from hope.

The King instructed his valet and his page to dress him as decently as they could for the coming of the Queen. He was profoundly upset at the curse which afflicted him, making him awful to look at, which no bathings nor lotions could disguise.

He was glad that it was winter, a grey, windy day when candles would be lit early.

The English servants did what they could, washing and anointing his disfigured face, dressing him in embroidered linen and a purple bedgown lined with sable. Yet when he looked at himself in the mirror that they brought him, he was repulsed by his image.

Much of his arrogance had gone with his looks. He felt abashed and weak, purged by physical humiliation of many vanities. He told John Taylor to bring him a mask of yellow silk taffeta he had worn once in a masked tilting at the ring when he and Huntly and Argyll on the sands at Leith had taken part against Moray and Lord Robert Stewart, and had been dressed as women with these masks and skirts and periwigs, and even after that handicap had won.

The long mask of fine wood covered with taffeta, with whiskers of

pink floss, was placed over his face, and he felt some return of confidence. At least he would not be repugnant to her; he felt a faint return of hope. She had at least, ventured alone into his stronghold; he was safe in Glasgow, but she was not. He recalled some of the old raptures, the violet-brown bed, the crimson enamel ring.

He asked whom she had brought with her and was told there was a lot of servants, including two foreign youths, and some others including Lord Livingstone and Lady Reres. At this last name the King winced, and asked who were the foreign servants; but John Taylor affected not to know. He did not want to tell his sick master that one of them was Giuseppe, David's brother, who was now employed in writing the Queen's foreign letters, and the other was Nicolas Hubert, nicknamed Paris, who was Lord Bothwell's lackey lately lent to the Queen.

He was ready long before she came, and lay propped up on his pillows, waiting. He had fled from Stirling when he had heard that due to Bothwell and Moray's persuasion she was going to pardon his one-time accomplices for the murder of David: and Morton and that other Douglas, Archibald, were returning to Scotland. The King had remembered that a Douglas had murdered a Stewart in Stirling Castle and he had fled from there to the only place in the island where he felt safe, believing his wife and his honour lost, his status mocked, the child not his...

But she had followed him, to take him back to his capital, her message said, to heal all differences between them, to effect a sincere reconciliation. If only it was true! Old dreams and hopes stirred in the sick man, who was simple and childlike under the vices which had stuck to him like burrs as he had passed through the thicket of the Court.

She came so quietly that at first he did not notice her presence. She

affected no surprise at seeing his mask, but approached the bed and seated herself in a great chair and smiled at him, looking weary and compassionate, even, he thought, humble.

He stared at her greedily through the eyeholes in the silk mask. She was dressed in a colour that reminded him oddly of bulrushes that he had seen in England. Her face was as smooth as the mask that disguised him, her hair was crimped stiffly either side her brow. The curious eyes, dark beneath the white lids and faint gold lashes, gave him a gentle look.

Without waiting for him to speak she began in a low tone to reproach him for the cruelty of the letters that she had received at Jedburgh and Edinburgh.

"I had good reason to write them," he replied, trying to resist the joy that her submission gave him.

"What is the cause of your sickness?" she asked delicately.

He shrugged his wide shoulders on the fringed pillows. "Some say the plague and some say poison; some say the pox, of which there is enough in Glasgow, and I say--you who sit there."

"Ah," she replied softly, "so it would seem that we destroy one another. All say that you were the cause that I nearly died at Jedburgh."

"If I have wronged you, I have made offers of repentance. I have failed in much towards you, but others have given you greater offence and you have pardoned them many times."

"So, too, have I pardoned you," she whispered, looking at him steadily. "Many times."

"I am young," he replied sullenly. "I am destitute of good advice. I came into a strange country and into the midst of difficult happenings. Have I not a chance to repent?"

"You offended deeply," said the Queen, but gently and smiling.

"Howsoever that may be," he replied, "I ask your pardon."

"What do you hope for now?" she asked curiously. "What do you want?"

He moved towards her on the bed and she shrank back slightly, noticing his bandaged hands, and the smell of ill-health that came from his body, even through the perfume of the ointments.

"I ask nothing else but that we may be together as husband and wife," came the unnatural sounding voice behind his mask. "What else is there for me but that? If you say no, I desire that I may never rise from this bed again. Ay, though I am not yet one-and-twenty years old, I have no desire to go on living. Give me an answer."

"I had not thought you had been so fond."

"Fond! God knows how I am punished for making you my idol, having no other thought but you. So it was from the first, Mary. I did not think so much of being King, although they pushed me on to snatch at that—it was you, those days at Stirling."

She did not answer and he hurried on, losing his reserve, his embarrassment, because of the mask and the half-shadows and the fact that they were alone together after so long a time. All the events that troubled him since their last meeting seemed vague, almost effaced. "You were the cause why I offended you," he said strangely. "Never, save for a short while at first, did you treat me as your husband. If, for my refuge, I, who have been much alone in Scotland,

could have opened my mind to you--but," he raised his hand and let it fall, "we were not as husband and wife ought to be, and I had to keep everything to myself, and so I am come to this desolation and jealousy. Perhaps I was mistaken in my jealousy, you are so much cleverer than I."

The Queen, still looking at him curiously and drawn back in her chair, said: "I am sorry for your sickness and I will try to find a remedy for it. I have good physicians if you will use them." Leaning forward, she added suddenly: "Why would you have gone away from Scotland in the English ship? Was not that to shame me and leave me abandoned and ridiculous?"

"Surely," he replied vehemently, "it is I who have been abandoned and ridiculous. How often have I come to you, and you have denied me, because there has been another within?"

He saw that she braced herself in fear of the name of David Rizzio. He did not say it, but muttered instead: "Moray, or Bothwell, or Huntly, some enemy of mine. Then, in other ways what has been my use? Not only have you taken all dignities from me and even the shadow of the Crown, but you know as well as I, I have had nothing to keep myself or my servants."

The Queen lifted her shoulder a little and he asked: "Why did you come here?"

When she did not answer he stared through the mask-holes and said:

"I ought to be warned and armed against you, but you are my own proper flesh and I do not think that you would do me harm. And if any other should try it," he added, "they shall buy it dear, unless they take me sleeping." Then as she sat motionless he added: "But I suspect

nothing."

"Whom should you suspect?" she replied. "All is mended with those who were your enemies, no one desires anything but peace and reconciliation, and the good government of Scotland."

"No one?" he asked. "Not Moray nor Morton? Mary, why did you recall those men who offended you so grievously?"

"To prove that I have forgotten as I have long since forgiven. What other reason could I have?"

"I thought it might be that you set them on the trail of another victim knowing them to be well skilled at murder. You forced me to betray them. For you I denied them."

"Your sickness," she replied, "has given you evil dreams."

She rose as if to leave, and even the threat of her withdrawal upset him.

"Keep me company," he implored. "Stay with me to-night. Have you only come here for this little talk?"

"I have nothing more to say now," she said gently. "I must abide in my own lodgings. You have mistaken much—but I did not come for reproaches."

She stood pensive by the chair and he asked why she was so sad.

"Truly," she replied, "I have not much cause for happiness. I have brought a litter with me to carry you more comfortably than you could go on horseback. I thought that I could lodge you at Craigmillar so that I might stay with you and not be far from our little son."

"Our son!" he muttered, then added: "A sick man should not travel in a litter and in so cold weather."

"Well," said she, "you cannot sit on horseback, that I can see. It is said you have a great weakness. Why do you wear that mask, Harry?"

He said:

"I would not be seen until I am cured."

"Well," she said, "you can have the baths at Craigmillar and be purged and clean. Will you come with me?"

"Ay, I will come, if we may be at board and bed together as husband and wife, and you promise to leave me no more."

"You want that?"

"Yes, if you promise this on your word, I will go where you please. Without it I will not go."

The Queen smiled again. Her expression was quite timid and humble.

"If I had not been minded to make peace with you, Harry, would I have come so far in this winter weather, give you my hand as the pledge of my body that I would love and use you as my husband?"

"Do you give me that?" he asked.

He moved along the bed towards her as if he would take her hand, but she stepped lightly out of his reach and told him again that before they could come together he must be healed of his sickness. She then asked him if he trusted everybody, if he had any evil in his heart

towards anyone? He replied:

"I make little count of any of them."

"Are you angry that Lady Reres is in my company?"

"I have little mind for such as she," replied the King, "I hope to God she serves you honourably."

"Well," said the Queen smiling, "I will come again after supper."

"Do you call this a reconciliation?" he asked from the pillow. "You will not come near me nor as much as touch my hand!"

At that she approached him steadily and stood within the bedcurtains.

"There have been some words gone before this, Harry, and it takes a little time for us to be as we were. Besides, your sickness--" her composure faltered. "Do not tell the Lords of any promise I have made you, it may be there are some would grudge you my favour."

At that he was angered and cried:

"I know no cause why they should dislike me. Are we not husband and wife? Look to it, Mary, you do not move any against me."

"I swear I will stir no one against you."

"We must work in one mind or both of us may be ruined."

"You speak very coolly and wisely," she replied. "I had not known you so prudent before."

"Perhaps I have been learning some hard lessons and now have

them by heart. It is not so long since I was at school, and though at first I always shirked my tasks, in the end I got them perfect."

"Well," said she, "I have never wronged you. The troubles you have in Scotland are of your own making."

"Ay," he replied, "my faults are known, but there are those that have made worse ones which have never been published."

She bent over him as if to kiss him, but withdrew without touching him and put her finger on her lips, with a soothing gesture of one who would quiet an invalid, and so withdrew to where, in the ante-chamber, two of her French girls, the Italian boy, and Lady Reres were waiting and whispering together.

As soon as he was alone the King struck upon a bell and ordered John Taylor to call Thomas Crawford, his father's gentleman, who had lately been in attendance on him and who was a shrewd and loyal man.

Then he pulled off the mask so violently that the ribbons snapped, for it irritated his inflamed face.

Thomas Crawford came quickly, for Lennox had told him to watch, listen and report, and he had been in a little closet, listening through a hole cut in the wall hidden behind the tapestry, so the King who was already weary, had not to repeat more than a few wards of what the Queen had said, except the sentences she had spoken in a low voice.

"What do you think, Crawford, of my journey to Edinburgh?"

"Sir, I do not like it. Why should the Queen's Grace take you to Craigmillar? Why not to your own house in Edinburgh rather than to a private gentleman's mansion two miles out of town?"

"Ay, why indeed?" said the sick man, tossing from side to side as if in pain.

"In my opinion," said Crawford, "she takes Your Grace more like a prisoner than like her husband."

The young man sat up in his bed and looked at his friend.

"I think little less myself," he replied with dignity. "I have nothing save my confidence in her promise."

"And do you, sir, trust in that?" asked Thomas Crawford, lowering his voice and looking round, as if the Queen's presence was still somewhere in the room. Henry Stewart made the sign of the Cross.

"Yes, I will put myself in her hands though she should cut my throat. I pray God to judge between us."

The Queen sat up late that night in her lodgings in Glasgow. She was knitting a bracelet of purple silk, in which she was twisting a design of golden beads. Now and then she paused in this employment to write hastily a few lines on an odd sheet of paper which lay before her on a small table.

The fire was out on the hearth, but she did not notice. Once she rose to draw the curtains more closely, for about two in the morning a strong wind rose and shook the very walls of the ancient house.

No one knew she was sitting up, not even Lady Reres. She moved cautiously and sheltered her candle behind the cabinet so that no ray of light might fall underneath the door.

She shivered a little. She was haunted by the past yet released from it; she no longer felt caged and confined by rules even if she had

never obeyed them. She had always been reckless and now her spirit seemed united with one as reckless, as bold as herself--the man to whom she wrote an account of her interview with her husband, intermingled with expressions of love.

She thought of her husband without emotion. How different he was, or else how skilful at pretending! Did he flatter her because he was afraid? Who could ever believe him? He had lied to her and to all Scotland, betraying his accomplices so lightly, and all the while she had in the casket where she had thrown the scarlet wedding-ring, the two bonds that he had signed for the murder of David.

No doubt he had lied again yesterday when he had told her he had made his god of her.

She held out the bracelet in the candlelight; she wished to finish it before the morning so that it could go with the letter. She must tell him to be careful where he wore it--up on his arm, yet even there carefully--he might be wounded or taken suddenly sick and several people had seen her knitting it.

She rose and looked in the jewel casket she had brought with her for gold clasps to finish the bracelet. She might make it too large, when it would slip down to his wrist, or too small, so that he could not get it up to his arm--she shrugged and smiled. When she had found the clasps she stood still for a while listening to the tempest and found pleasure in the sound of the wind rushing past the windows and the heavy splashing of the rain against the casement.

Would it be so easy? Surely somebody would warn him--one of those forty horsemen who, alert and suspicious, had ridden out to meet her, or Thomas Crawford, who had dogged her every step, who was no doubt hidden in a closet listening to the interview, or his father, always crafty, sly and suspicious. Would none of these warn

him? Would he, on her word only, follow her to where he would be unprotected in the hands of his enemies?

"The fool," she muttered with disgust. "Why must I think of him so much?"

That she could beguile him so easily filled her with contempt for him. She shuddered with physical repugnance as she recalled the night at Stirling. How could she ever have seen a golden Adonis in that stupid youth! Now he was like a leper, bandaged, detestable behind the mask which he had worn to hide a disfigured face. The smell of his breath, the sweat from his body not disguised by strong perfume, reminded her sickeningly of the days and nights she had passed with her first husband.

Yet she was sorry for the way it had to be done. She liked the grand, open action.

"I have never deceived anybody," she scribbled on the nearly filled piece of paper, then laughed thinking what a lie that was. Though she did not like this manner of intrigue, her whole life had been a lie. Yet she could not blame herself, she had acted as she had been taught, as she had been forced.

A pity it could not have been done quickly, without this to-do. Suddenly, as David had been disposed of--or John Gordon, or Chastelard.

Supposing he really trusted her? She turned that thought over in her mind, as she sat above the unfinished letter listening to the wind and the rain, her glance fixed before her on the half-light of the single candle. She did not feel any compassion for him, but she had a faint feeling that some other woman in her situation might have been melted by pity, might have dwelt on his helplessness, on his youth, on

the bad luck he had had and her treatment of him from the first, how she had seduced him, used him, flung him aside. Perhaps another woman might have thought like that. But she had written in her letter: "My heart is as the diamond and you need not fear but I shall do it."

She was one with the man to whom she wrote, one purpose, one courage, one desire, and he, like herself, was married to one of a false race. She thought of her lover and smiled. What had he asked of her? Only to bring the fool to Edinburgh. There had been no word of anything else.

She finished the bracelet, put it down on the letter, and thought of Jane Gordon as she had stood before her in Edinburgh Castle. "That was the night when I thought I was going to die in a few hours. How sly she was, Huntly's daughter, how cunning and full of lies--she said he loved her."

The Queen began to laugh softly, remembering her need for secrecy. How could Jane Gordon know what love was any more than Henry Stewart knew?

She finished her letter and sealed it. Strange, whatever one did, however one manoeuvred, it came in the end to blood. One could not escape--that was the way of it. No doubt it was foolish to try to escape. When she had been very young she had been shocked and frightened by violence, and now she had learnt that the world was like that. She had fainted when she had seen John Gordon mangled on the block, but she had not lost her senses when she knew that Pierre de Chastelard had been executed. She had shrugged and gone on with her play. What else was possible?

When she had ridden outside she had had to see corpses hanging on the gallows, decaying heads stuck on spikes over gateways; she had had to know that people every day were being tortured and killed

in Edinburgh. Sometimes even while she feasted she had been aware that executions took place by torchlight in the market place.

Well, she had had to accept that. When she had been Queen of France, her relations, the Guise, had beheaded the Huguenots in the courtyard of Amboise for an after-dinner diversion for the ladies. One could not escape blood, violence, treachery.

Why regret this man more than another? He was a murderer and blood cried for blood. She thought of the Italian's face as he crouched in the corner of her closet. She recalled his shrieks as he had been dragged away. Who had had any pity then?

She folded up her bracelet. How tired she was, scarcely recovered from that illness at Jedburgh and burdened by the secret child. There was a constant pain in her side and often when alone she collapsed from fatigue, though in public she kept erect and gay.

Would this be the end of it? Would this man into whose hands she had given all she had turn out to be the King and master for whom she was looking?

She thought of Moray. What part did he play, with Maitland? He was always there, serene, cool, advising her. Did he know what was being planned? She went over carefully in her mind the last time she had seen him. She had cried out in an excess of emotion against her husband, saying she must have a divorce, she must somehow be rid of him, yet she would have no speck upon her honour nor any slur upon her child.

Moray had said nothing, but Maitland had replied--she felt he was her half-brother's mouthpiece:

"Your Majesty is a Papist and scrupulous, and my Lord Moray is a

Protestant and scrupulous, yet if Your Grace and his lordship will leave all to your faithful friends, you may trust that the young man will be gotten rid of without reproach to Your Majesty or to your son."

She had inquired no further. Only when her master had given her instructions to fetch her husband from Glasgow she had obeyed without question.

Her need was very great. He must not leave her, he must not guess the truth, she must marry her lover. She would not be ashamed openly, she would not bear a bastard before all Europe. She wanted the child. She thought that only in the child could she finally express and relieve the passion that was consuming her, but it must be born in wedlock.

She silenced her thoughts, it was better not to think; there was so much to be done. When it was over she would go away to some solitary place and have her child in secret, with only Mary Seaton and Lady Reres. She would stay in retirement so long that no one would know when it was born and she would not be shamed.

Did anyone suspect? Did even Lady Reres or Mary Seaton guess?

From utter weariness, the long ride, and the long watching, she fell asleep at last, the bright, disordered chestnut hair falling across the letter and the bracelet, while the candle guttered and went out.

When she woke she was in darkness. She rose and pulled the curtains apart and saw it was dawn. At once her alert mind recalled every circumstance of her situation.

She quietly left her room and went down the corridor to where the Italian lodged, and knocked on his door.

He was waiting for some such signal and he was there instantly.

ready dressed.

"Give these to Paris," whispered the Queen. "You know for whom."

Then she hurried back to her room and fell on to her bed while Giuseppe tiptoed to the closet where Paris was and roused him where he slept.

There was no need for the Italian to tell him what he was to do with the letter and the packet. These two knew all the secrets of their master and mistress. A smile and a nod was sufficient. The dainty Frenchman, cursing the bleak northern weather, set out from Glasgow with the Queen's letter and present to Earl Bothwell safely hidden in his coat.

Thomas Crawford urged Lord Lennox to persuade his son to remain in Glasgow where he was safe. The old man was afflicted by a bleeding from the nose and could scarcely move, but he sent a message to the King, imploring him not to leave or put himself in the hands of a woman who had so often deceived him or the power of men whom he had so grievously offended. Lennox implored Crawford to remind the King's Grace that one who was now in favour at Holyrood was a sorcerer. What did his own bleeding at the nose portend? Misfortune, as everyone knew!

Henry Stewart listened gravely to these warnings and made the sign of the Cross. But nothing could change his resolve, he had decided to trust his wife.

The King allowed himself to be placed in the litter that the Queen had brought, and without escort or any more of his own people than a few servants, accompanied her from Glasgow to Edinburgh.

She told him that she had found Craigmillar inconvenient, but that

she had taken a lodging for him near Holyrood, where he could not go for fear of infection to the Prince.

He asked if this was the new house of the Hamiltons recently built outside the city walls, and she said "No; was she likely to lodge him with his enemies?" Besides, the Archbishop of St. Andrews dwelt there himself.

She had, however, she said, a nice house for him that was not far away. It was part of the monastic buildings in the Church of St. Mary, which the Reformers had lately destroyed; it was in good repair and on healthy ground.

When the cavalcade, which travelled slowly because of the sick man, halted, it was at this house. The Church of St. Mary in the field near by, was ruined and rootless; the cloisters had long since been disused. The spot was lonely and the city walls nearby were broken down. Beyond were some gardens and orchards and a desolate road with some alms-houses on one side known as "Thieves Row."

But the house in which the King was lodged was in good repair, though it was a long time since it had been lived in and the spot though desolate, was convenient for Holyrood, away from the stench and noise of the city. It had also been very handsomely furnished.

When the King was carried to the lower apartment and saw the French tapestries on the walls, the Chair of Estate in watered yellow and red silk, and the fine carpets on the floor, he asked who had been to this trouble for him, and the Queen replied that she had given her instructions and that it was Lord Bothwell who had carried them out.

He was escorted upstairs, helped under either arm by his English servants, and found his bedchamber arranged with equal costliness.

He noticed that the bed that had been set up was the one which he had first seen in Stirling Castle, in which, secretly, he had first slept with the Queen.

As he was placed between the scented sheets and the silken coverlets, the Queen said:

"This belonged to my mother. I have no handsomer bed-furniture, and, sir, I made it my gift to you."

He lay back, exhausted by the journey, and took the taffeta covering off his face for he could not longer endure it, his weakness having been increased by the journey through the cold and rain.

"Will you sleep here?" he asked. "Remember your promise, Mary--we were to be as husband and wife!"

"When you are cleansed," she said smiling, looking steadily at his blotched face. "The bath has been set up in the next room, and my physician has prepared the cures and will direct it all."

She then said with an air of great exhaustion that the pain in her side troubled her, and left him, going, as he thought, to the room below, which he had heard had been prepared for her. But presently the English boy, Taylor, came to him and told him that the Queen had left the house and gone with all her train by torchlight to Holy-rood; she had left a message saying she would return in the morning.

"Well," said the King, "I have put all into her hands. She has been at some pains to make this an agreeable lodging, and I have nothing to lament. What manner of house are we in? I do not remember having ever been here when I was in Edinburgh before."

"Sir, it is the old Provost's House and has not been lived in for many a day. Mr. Standen thinks it is damp, and no place for a sick man.

None of your servants, sir, is pleased."

"Well, no doubt they are uneasy, but we are safe enough relying on her word. Who lodges near, have you found out?"

"Sir, as I say, the whole place is ruinous. The cloisters are empty, the houses to right and left uninhabited and without furniture. We are near the city wall, some two miles from the Abbey. I think Your Grace should have a guard..." The youth paused, fearing lest he had said too much, and when his voice ceased there was utter silence in the room.

The King thought: This is a strange, desolate place to bring me. But some nobility, deeper than all the habits and circumstances of his life, silenced his misgivings. He had been in fear of his life, but once he had said that he would trust her he refused to entertain any doubt. She was his wife before God and she had passed to him her word as woman and princess. He clung desperately to that simple consolation.

He was also reassured by her magnificent gift. Had she not meant, when she had these violet-brown and crimson draperies set up, to remind him of the night in Stirling, when they had pledged themselves to each other for ever?

He looked about him at the room--at the vessels of agate and onyx, the bowls of alabaster and crystal, the lights in silver and gilt sticks, the chests of garments which John Taylor was opening, in which were gifts of furs and rolls of cloth of gold and damask armour, and jewelled swords and knives. Surely she meant their reconciliation to be complete.

"Boy, did the Queen's Grace say Lord Bothwell furnished this house for me?"

"Yes, sir, so she said."

"Why do you look so frightened, Taylor, when you speak that name?" And the King smiled, remembering Bothwell's reputation as a sorcerer, smiled to hide a sudden pang he had felt himself.

He believed Bothwell his friend, much as he had at first feared and mistrusted the Queen's last favourite. He had shown himself on his side in the quarrel with Moray. At one time Bothwell alone of all the court had supported the King.

"A sorcerer," said the English boy, crossing himself, and he added with a peculiar vehemence: "No one can be easy, sir, until Earl Bothwell has left Scotland."

"He does not disturb me," said the King, "you are a little fool. Say your prayers and you can despise a wizard's tricks. What is the nearest house?" he added.

"The Hamiltons' house, sir--the Duke's place. There is noise and lights there to-night; they say the Archbishop has taken up his residence."

"Well, I suppose I must be reconciled with them too. Bring me up some wine, then I'll sleep. I think it true that the air is good here, I feel revived already."

The English boy left to execute his master's orders and found the two Antony Standens grumbling about the lonely place where their master and themselves had been lodged.

"The King seems bewitched that he is so satisfied."

"Earl Bothwell prepared this state lodging."

Angry, uneasy, they made themselves as comfortable as they could in their new lodgings, wondering how a proud woman like the Queen could put up with a sorcerer.

On the first morning of the King's lodging in the Provost House of St. Mary's monastery, which was known to the people of Edinburgh as Kirk o' Field, a man who lodged in the Canongate and worked for a silversmith, knocked up the King's household and begged that he might be brought into His Grace's presence.

This was refused, for he had no business to state and seemed in confusion. But he was very anxious and the two Antony Standens followed him when he was turned away, and walking with him down the ruined cloisters where the walls were covered with damp and the wet lay in pools in the broken flagstones, asked him what he wanted.

But he, with the English gentlemen on either side of him, seemed suddenly terrified. The sudden emotion which had sent him on his errand had died down. He did not want to speak and tried to get away.

But they forced him to tell his business, which, as far as they could make out from his Scots accent, was that last night he had dreamed he had seen a man lying in an orchard with his neck broken, stark naked, with his eyes staring and when the sleeper had awakened the horror had been so real that, hardly knowing what he did, he had come to the old house where the King was, hardly knowing why. but almost without his own volition.

At this the two Englishmen let him go. They did not ask if, nor did he volunteer this knowledge, he had seen and recognized the face of the dead naked man in the orchard. But it was in their thoughts.

The King had been a week in the handsomely furnished house in

Kirk o' Field, and hour by hour his health and confidence returned. The Queen came to visit him daily with almost every noble in Scotland in her train to pay him homage and wish him a good recovery. None of these showed more service and friendliness than Earl Bothwell, to whom the young King took an increased liking, finding this elegant and accomplished man far more to his taste than the grim, gloomy and rough Lords with whom he had been in league over David's murder. He decided when he was recovered and King indeed, with possession of the realm and the Queen, to confirm Bothwell in his high post.

Moray came to visit the King also, and his presence further reassured Henry Stewart, for the Queen's half-brother, whom he had always feared and dreaded, spoke to him frankly of the future of Scotland, of his wife and child, and the peace to which they might all look forward.

But of what was happening in the outer world, the King knew nothing. He had such news of his wife and her friends brought to his sick chamber as his servants and the English gentlemen could collect, and this was very little, for everything seemed quiet enough in Scotland.

The care of the French physician, renewed hope, and expectancy of better things to come, brought a quick recovery to the strong young man. The scars of his disease began to heal on his body, his strength returned.

He began to pester the Queen for an end to what was, after all, a kind of captivity, agreeable though she might try to make it, and to beg that she would take him again to Holyrood, to his former rooms with the stair that led to her apartments. When he said this she gave him a cunning look, and he thought of David and said hastily: Could not they lodge somewhere else in the Abbey and not in the old

tower? To which she replied: "I lodge there no longer."

Two nights she had slept under his room in Kirk o' Field, and a third night she had intended, she said, to sleep there also; but when she came on the evening of the day that she had promised to stay, she told him that she had forgotten two of her servants were to be married that evening, and she had promised to attend the ball and banquet, not that she had much heart to do so while he lay sick, but that she would not hurt these kind, faithful people. She told him that one was Sebastian Page, whom he might remember at the christening feast, for he had arranged the masque of satyrs' tails which had offended the English and caused a brawl. She laughed with him over the old story that Englishmen had short, fat tails like stags.

"Well," said the King, "I would not deprive you of your merriment nor your kindness, but look to it you come again soon. Indeed, I feel that I could walk now and even ride horseback."

"Perhaps," said she, "we might ride to-morrow. The weather is suddenly better; there was some sun to-day."

"Yet none in this chamber," he smiled. "Who will be at your banquet?"

She told him all of them--Argyll, Huntly, Bothwell, Lord Robert Stewart, Cassilis; but Moray would not be there, for his wife was ill and he had gone to visit her in her country house.

The King expressing again his impatience and loneliness in this desolate lodging, the Queen asked if she had failed in any service or duty towards him, if he had not found everything to his taste?

He told her that it was so and that he lacked only her company, and

then on a casual recollection, asked her if she had been having the bed put up or down in the room beneath his for he had heard noises during that day and had sent the, page boy down to see what was happening, but he had found both doors locked—to the garden and to the street.

The Queen replied, "Yes, I am having the bed altered. I do not think I shall have need for it any more, for I do not think we need lie apart any longer. We may meet in the same bed to-morrow at Holyrood, then you will believe that I do mean a reconciliation towards you."

She stooped towards him as she spoke, her face, usually so pale, was flushed, and beneath the winter cloak that she wore he saw the glitter of the emeralds on her dress. He took her hand and kissed it, the first time that he had touched her for weeks, for despite her friendliness she had never allowed him to come close. Now she did not repel him, but looked down, smiling, at his bent head.

"Do you believe me yet?" she asked, taking her hand from him.

She slipped from her finger the scarlet ring which he had not seen her wear since the night of David's murder, when she had sent it to him by Lady Argyll. She put it in his palm.

"A ring, a pledge, after the manner of lovers, to assure you of my faith."

Reassured, happy in his returning strength, the young man gazed at her as she stood there in the candlelight. Then she spoke, and her words were as unexpected as they were horrible to the listener.

"It is nearly a year since the slaying of David."

"Is this your reconciliation?" he cried reproachfully.

"I do not know why it came into my mind."

She smiled at him again, renewed her promises for the morning, and was gone, leaving him staring at the red enamel ring in the palm of his hand.

He heard her leave and the house seemed very silent, so that he called up the chamber-boy and asked where the Antony Standens were.

They had gone to the ball at Holyrood given for the marriages of Sebastian Page and Christine Hogg, so that the King had only five servants with him in the lonely house.

He called them all in for company's sake and asked them to fetch wine. Then he drank their health, saying that they had been faithful to him in his sickness and he would see they were rewarded, for happier days were coming when they should see him as King.

They pledged him and left, going to their sleeping apartments which were in a corridor at right-angles to his room. Only John Taylor remained. It was late, but the King did not want to sleep.

He got out of bed and walked up and down the room, while the English boy, half-asleep, sat on the bedstep and waited his master's pleasure.

The King took up a lute and began to sing. He broke off in the middle and said moodily:

"The Queen's Grace spoke of the slaying of Rizzio to-night. It is a long time since she has mentioned that."

"Sir, it would be because it is nearly a year ago," replied the boy. "Will you not get into bed, sir, and rest? The doctor said you should

not force your strength."

"Did that letter go to my father?" asked the King restlessly. "The one wherein I told him that my dear love, the Queen and I, were reconciled."

"Sir, I sent it as you bid me--at once. My lord should have had it two days ago."

"I must try to sleep."

The young man sat on the edge of the bed, but instead of getting in it he said:

"We will sing the fifth Psalm."

The page looked at him in surprise. But obediently found the book where the Psalms were set to music in English, a version which Henry Stewart liked.

The page propped up the book against a chair, took another lute, and in the silence of the lonely house the two young men began to sing.

There was a tap on the door and the King called out to whoever it was to enter. Another of his English servants came in, holding a candle in one hand and under his arm a shoe of satin. He put it down on the chair in front of the open Book of Psalms.

"I found that in the grass just now. See, sir, it is covered with dew or rain."

"Well," asked the King, "what of it? What is this mystery?"

"I do not know, sir, God forgive me! Twenty minutes or so ago I heard

a noise and looked out very quietly from my casement. I saw one without whom I knew to be William Powrie, Earl Bothwell's porter--I recognized him in the light in the porch--but when I went down to see what his business was, he was gone and I could find no one. And I went out, looking round, and then in the grass I came upon this. It is a man's dancing slipper."

"It is one belonging to one of the Lords in attendance on the. Queen, probably," said the King. "Take it away." The man hesitated.

"Sir, why should Earl Bothwell's porter be here?"

"I expect you are mistaken," replied the King indifferently, "but if it were he, he might have come about some of the furniture which they moved beneath."

"Ay, sir, that's it," said the Englishman. "What is it they do move beneath? There's no getting into the room, it is locked on either side, and the window is curtained from within."

"What should be in there?" replied the King with contempt. "What fancies have you got now?"

"Sir, the place is very lonely and we are strangers here; you, sir, as much as I."

The King was silent, and the other two looked at him anxiously in the light of the candles. Then he said to himself, frowning:

"I declared that I would trust her and that God must judge between us."

Then he told the servant to go to bed and leave him for he wanted to finish singing his psalm.

But the anxious manservant, still holding the gentleman's shoe, broke in:

"Sir, Earl Bothwell's Frenchman was here to-night. He was in that room underneath, and when the Queen was mounting her horse, he came out, and she said to him, laughing: 'Jesu, Paris, how grimed you are!' and then he blushed red."

"What was he grimed with?" asked the King.

"I do not know, sir. He is always painted, and to-night over the red and white was a certain black--I thought it gunpowder."

The three listened intently. It was a still night and there was no sound.

"I hear nothing," said the King.

But the servant insisted that he could detect, though faintly, footsteps below.

"It is one of the others moving about. Go and see what it is," said Henry Stewart.

As the man left the room on tiptoe, leaving the door open behind him, the King rose, telling the boy to shut up the Book of Psalms and put away the lute.

"Everything is absolutely still, I hear nothing. Why was that fellow so disturbed?"

"Sir, I do not know," replied Jahn Taylor, trying to master his own agitation and wondering why the King was so calm. "It is true the place is very lonely. Hark, sir! There is someone below."

The King stood erect, listening.

Yes, there could be no mistake now, there were footsteps to be heard--those, he thought, of several men.

He looked sharply at John Taylor and saw that the boy had run to the window.

"Sir, quickly! There is someone coming up! This way! We can get through to the orchard!"

"If they have come for me," said the King, "they have ringed the house and there will be no escape."

He went to the window and opened it, feeling on his face the sudden cold of the winter night. As he leaned over the bent figure of the page trying to see what was below, the boy looking round suddenly shrieked. The King turned.

In the doorway that his servant had left open he saw Archibald Douglas, one of the murderers of David, wearing a dark mantle and with one shoe. Behind him showed the face of Giuseppe Rizzio, and behind both of them, picked out of the shadow by the light of the candles were the pale eyes of Earl Bothwell.

The Queen had left the marriage festivities early and was walking up and down the Presence Chamber sometimes pausing before the door of her oratory, though she never opened it.

About two o'clock, she went into her bedchamber where a bright fire was burning. Mary Seaton had fallen asleep in a deep chair beside the hearth, and as the Queen entered with the lightest of steps, she sprang up. The Queen stood rigid, though with no sign of terror. A sound like a cannonade penetrated the seven-foot-thick walls of the tower.

Mary Seaton fell on her knees. What had happened? The English! A surprise attack! Rebels! Firing from the castle! The Queen put her hand over the girl's mouth.

"Listen! It does not come again. It is an accident--an explosion somewhere."

"Oh, God! Oh, madame! Oh, Jesu! Oh, Holy Virgin!"

"Go," said the Queen under her breath, "out to the head of the stairs and listen."

"Madame, I dare not, on my soul I dare not!"

"Then I will go."

The Queen crossed the Chamber of Presence and the ante-room, and came out on the head of the stairs. There were people running about, crying in fright, issuing incoherent orders in the confusion. The echoes of the tremendous sound still hung about the palace.

The Queen went back into her rooms and shut the doors on this hubbub. When they came to search for her they found her seated on the throne. All the light she had came from the torches in the courtyard that flickered across the open windows.

At first the group that broke in on her were frightened and fell back as if they had seen a dead woman enthroned there, she was so pale, and it seemed such a strange place for her to be at this hour, but she spoke calmly and asked why they had left her so long alone and in some peril, as she might suppose? What was, the tumult and the noise? She looked at them carefully as they came forward, one of them holding a large lantern the light of which fell on the hem of her gown trailing down the steps of the throne.

Argyll, Huntly, and Atholl, the wives of the Earls of Mar and Atholl, Sir William Maitland were there: it was he who held the lantern. He was fully dressed but the others were in their nightgowns except for Bothwell, who wore a heavy cavalry cloak over his clothes.

Lady Mar fell on her knees on the steps of the throne and began to ask if Her Majesty could bear ill news?

"I am used to it," said the Queen, and looked past the kneeling woman to the men. She beckoned Bothwell forward. "Can you speak?" she asked. "I have not usually found you tongue-tied."

"Madame, there has occurred a monstrous chance which everyone wonders at. The King's lodging, even to the very foundations, has been blown in the air. All the building is ruined."

"Ah! And the King?"

"Everyone," breathed Maitland, taking the words from Bothwell, "is in such terror, there are such fearful rumours--the whole house has fallen, the very stones ground into powder from what can be seen by torchlight."

"And the King?" repeated the Queen, rising and holding on to the arms of the throne as if she took command not only of them, but of all the actions of the night.

"Madame," said Bothwell, "we went there on the instant and found him in the orchard beyond Thieves Row, with his page boy, under a tree--and both were dead. Dead and naked."

The Queen came slowly down the steps, ignoring the kneeling woman on the steps, who was crying. She stared at Bothwell's hands as if she pictured the work they had been about a short time before.

"It was a pity for the boy," she said "A very willing, pleasant lad, who never did any harm."

"And for the King, madame?" cried Lady Mar, incredulous.

"That passes pity," replied the Queen. She looked at Bothwell. "What friend has he to speak for him? What champion to take his part?"

"Madame," said Bothwell, "all is a mystery. How is one to judge anything in the dark and the confusion?"

The Queen noticed that two of the buttons had been wrenched from his coat. By whose hand?

She saw the faces that stared in the flickering light, Bothwell's steady eyes, the torn coat, his white hands. Nothing beyond this, nothing.

"I'd like a drink," she said. "It is so hot."

Lady Mar rose to take her under the arm and support her to her bedroom door.

"See," remarked Bothwell to Maitland, "the courage of a great princess."

"A paragon," said Sir William daintily, as the door closed on the Queen. "She bears this great disaster nobly. After their reconciliation, too, that was hard. So young a man! To be murdered like that--" His voice was dry and brittle, he remarked that the Chamber of Presence was cold and that they might as well get back to their beds.

The Queen, in her room, took her arm from Lady Mar, passed Mary Seaton, and went into the little closet, closing the door behind her.

There she stayed in the silence and darkness of the place where David had been dragged away nearly a year ago.

* * *

PART 3 - The Rose Tree At Loch Leven

"It is too frequent with noblemen to be dishonest; piety, chastity, and such-like virtues are for private men, not much to be looked for in great Courts."

—Democritus Junior.

3. The Rose Tree At Loch Leven

The Earl of Moray waited in France. Outwardly he seemed ruined--a statesman without a government, a warrior without an army, a prince without a kingdom. But he was not worried. He knew that he had only to wait, and he did not think it was likely that he would wait long. News from Scotland arrived regularly from Sir William Maitland, who remained with the Queen.

Everything had gone as he had arranged it; just as Henry Stewart had been used to destroy Rizzio, so Earl Bothwell had been used to destroy Henry Stewart, and now he in his turn must go.

Bothwell's ascendancy after the removal of the King had been brilliant and sudden, and Moray, without a farewell to his sister, had gone to France, leaving the conduct of Scottish affairs to other men. He was, glad that he had such an able instrument as Maitland, who continued to move among these dangerous intrigues, and to keep close to the Queen's side. Morton, too, and his influence with Knox was invaluable to Moray.

Moray watched how all Europe recoiled from the murder of King Henry, and how warnings and advice from England, France, and from her own Ambassador in Paris, had been sent to the Queen that

she should at once search out the assassins and show no favour to the man who was judged the chief of them--Earl Bothwell. He gathered up all the gossip and tried to sift truth from lies.

What of the Queen throughout this? Moray had sought an exact knowledge of her behaviour. But it was not easy, for she lived sometimes in the castle, sometimes in Holyrood, sometimes away in the hills, and the reports as to her conduct differed. Maitland, who kept close to her and whose delicate curiosity could probe the minds of most people, wrote in his cautious cipher to Moray that even he did not quite know what to say of the Queen. It was believed that she would marry Bothwell, yet that seemed hard to credit. All Europe deplored her choice.

Moray, watching from afar, saw her light as a bubble on a wave riding to annihilation. She no longer concerned him, nor his politics, aims, and ideals. These now concentrated on the child, the Protestant Prince who should rule Scotland and perhaps England.

He had all his schemes prepared. He would be Regent. Quite soon, when Bothwell had run his lunatic course, the Lords would send for him, and he and Maitland would rule Scotland, wise, justly, cautiously, not binding the country over-much to either France or England but building it up to independence.

For what had passed he had no regret. He knew that the crime in Kirk o' Field could be turned to considerable account, first to destroy Bothwell, then to keep Huntly, Morton, even Maitland, in their places. The only one who was under no suspicion was he who had stood apart and designed it all--Moray himself.

He had been a little astonished, used as he was to murder, that this crime had so resounded in Europe. King Henry had not been popular; he had been of no use to anyone, nor could Moray think

whom there might be to miss him. Yet even those who had disliked him, or never seen him, or thought of him with complete indifference, now clamoured for vengeance on the King, only twenty-one years old, brutally murdered.

Moray himself, in public, joined in the outcry, expressing the deepest horror, the greatest alarm. It had made a useful excuse for his withdrawal from Scotland: he declared that he held the whole country shamed until the murderers were discovered. In secret, he thought the thing was clumsily done and blamed Bothwell. It should have been sudden, all over in a flash of fire, the King and his servants tossed into the air and killed instantly. But the murderers must have been noisy, and discovered. Moray was astonished that Archibald Douglas at least had not managed better than that. The King had evidently escaped from the house and they had had to pursue him into the orchard, strangle him with the sleeves of his dressing-gown, stuff a handkerchief steeped, in vinegar into his mouth—ugly, clumsy, and stupid.

They had been careful to murder the page boy, John Taylor; no doubt he had seen too much. But they had allowed other servants to escape who might, even in the dark and confusion, have seen more than they should have.

Then, the explosion after the murder. Moray considered that a foolish destruction of valuable property. But perhaps it had served some purpose since it had inflamed the public mind against the assassins and impressed them with something almost supernatural about the deed, which suited Moray's purpose very well, but he was sorry not to have saved the Queen. Her doom was in herself, and nothing could rescue her. He had tried long and diligently to protect her; even after the murder of David he had thought that it might have been done, but now it was too late. It did not matter much, he thought, the actual degree of her guilt. It was not likely that even Bothwell had discussed

with her the details of her husband's murder. But she had done all she had been asked to do--she had decoyed the poor young man from safety and placed him in the hands of his enemies.

Moray wondered at her audacity, her remarkable courage. She dared to flout all Europe to favour Bothwell.

But only when Moray heard that Jane Gordon was to be divorced both according to the Protestant and the Roman Catholic laws did he believe that it was the Queen's intention to marry that lawless and bloody man.

When Moray heard this news he came to Paris, awaiting his recall. The Lords were forming themselves up against Bothwell as they had formed themselves against the King, and no one believed that the Queen could hold the throne long after her marriage with the Earl.

Maitland sent reports of her behaviour. Sometimes she was in the depths of misery and wished that she was dead; sometimes she was ill and kept her bed for days together, complaining of her old malady--the pain in her side. Sometimes she was gay and spent hours on horseback, riding. But always she remained resolute in her favours to Bothwell.

In April came the news of the Queen's abduction--a farce at which everyone laughed. Bothwell had carried her off with a few of her escort to Dunbar, and when she had been released she had entered Edinburgh with Bothwell leading her bridle.

Soon after, he had commanded John Craig, Knox's substitute in the Church, to publish his banns with the Queen.

Moray had read with pleasure of the action of John Craig. He had not hesitated to face the man who was the master of Scotland. Attending

the Privy Council he accused the Earl of murdering the King, seducing the Queen, and illegally divorcing Jane Gordon.

It had been useless--the Queen had insisted on the marriage. The Lords banded together in Stirling, where Mar held the prince, and fortified the castle. This was the last news out of Scotland.

By the middle of May, Moray had heard that the Queen had married Bothwell, whom she had created Duke of Orkney. He sent long and minute instructions to Maitland and Morton and his other minions. He was expecting his recall within a few weeks; he had not expected events to be quite so hurried as this. How long was it since Henry Stewart had been murdered? Looking at his calendar, he was startled to find that it was only eight weeks.

He knew what people said in France about the scandalous divorce, the abduction, the hasty marriage. Poor fool, did she not understand that her husband was doomed without her interference? The men whom he had betrayed would have accounted for him, but still she must meddle. He understood her threefold motive--revenge for David, lust for Bothwell, desire for the child to be born in wed lock. What sort of creature had she become? He knew what was said of her; he had plumbed the depths of the filth that tarnished her name. He did not defend her, but he was uneasy with her shame.

"No one will come," said the Queen smiling. "We are quite alone." Softly, and as if she were talking to herself, she started to recite the state they were in. They had no money, only a few of his own men followed them. If she were to raise her standard she doubted if any would rally to it. Lennox was inflaming the country against her, even the Hamiltons held off. Everywhere there seemed to be distrust, suspicions, disloyalty. The people, she knew how they branded her, she knew what was said in the pulpits. England would help the Lords and France would not help her. Moray had come to Paris, he was

waiting, she knew, to pounce. But what to do? What to do?

The Queen's husband did not answer these reproaches. He had his own case to think of. He had dared to shoot at a high mark and he believed he had missed. Behind him had been Moray. There was no dealing with such crafty, cunning, slippery rogues as that. He had thought that the Lords who had used him to murder the King and who promised him the Queen's hand if he did so, would have stood by him. But not As soon as he had married the Queen they had all withdrawn, and slowly every Scot was moving towards them so that he saw himself, with the Queen, abandoned. And there was no money, none.

Nor could he see any hope in the future. Where could he find an alliance or revenues or armies? What use was the Queen to him if she lost her power, her authority, her country?

He looked at her curiously. She was no longer even beautiful, she had neglected herself. Had she been anyone but the Queen he would have left her long ago, but he accepted his misfortune without reproach. He did not intend to give way until he was forced to do so. He still had confidence in his own courage and resources: he did not know what it was to be afraid of anyone or to pity anyone.

The Queen, seeing that he took no notice of her, rose from the steps of the dais. Her eyes flickered across to the empty throne where she could visualize Henry Stewart, sullen, but splendid, frowning down at her perplexity.

"Since you will not listen, I must save my words," she said. "You have had everything of me, you know I would not have done it for my own vengeance, nor would I have married with you if it had not been for the child. See, I have set you up, and what gratitude do I get?"

"Sweet madame," he replied pleasantly, "it seems that all I should owe you gratitude for is a broken neck. I do not think we can hold this throne, you and I."

"You should have thought of that before."

"Perhaps I did think of it; perhaps it was the difficulty I liked. There is a challenge about attempting the impossible, and I admit to two mistakes. I thought the Lords would have used me better, and I did not think that there would be this outcry for that foolish boy."

"You promised you would not speak of that to me."

"Yet I do not think, madame, it much concerns you to hear the tale. You weep very much but your heart is not touched."

"My heart," whispered the Queen. "What talk of any heart was there ever between you and me?"

"Or between you and any man. Who had need to say more than--'Come to me,' and you were in his arms?"

"You were glad to lie in mine. And not only because I was the Queen."

They spoke to each other politely. His courtesy always overbore her outbursts and he never said anything about the low estate to which he had brought her. But she did not notice his omission. She had a carriage and generosity of spirit that made reproaches impossible to her for long.

She began to speak of the child who had been the reason behind the farcical divorce, the impossible marriage. She could not conceal her condition much longer--where could she, married six weeks, hide to give birth to a full term child?

"With Lady Reres at Inchmahome." He was always ready with an answer. "I have those whom I could trust to send with you."

She was at once startled and comforted. Inchmahome! The lonely castle in the lonely lake, where she had been sent as a child to escape the English--yes, that would be a safe retreat. Lady Reres, with her bawdy talk would be good company, and Mary Seaton, who was almost a saint, would be there to make her peace with Heaven.

The man, watching her, was pleased to see her smile. He was jealous about the child whom he wanted to see as future King of Scotland, instead of Moray's protégè whom he believed to be the Italian's son. He had paid Lady Reres very well to watch the Queen closely so that there was no chance for any tricks with the apothecary.

As for popular talk, he grinned at that. Most people knew the truth, but he defied them to utter it. They took hope from their common courage, and laughed at each other. After all, much, perhaps everything, might yet be saved.

"I do love you," said the Queen, encouraged by his equanimity. She came to his side and rested her head on his shoulder. Bothwell suffered her with good humour, he intended to behave with dignity during what might be left of their life together, and he told her that she should put a brave face upon things, at least in public.

"I see little hope for us," he said, "but why should we give way before we must? There'll be many a battle yet before they have us where they wish to put us."

"And where's that?" she asked, looking up with a half-laugh.

"Madame, did you not sign a decree of death against adulterers and

fornicators and such persons?"

"I was forced to it--Maitland forced me. He said it was expected--the people clamoured for it."

"The time was aptly chosen," remarked Bothwell good-humouredly. But he said he had hopes of doing something yet; with the money that came from things he had sold he could get together some more men--he was a good soldier and knew how to do well with a small force.

She kissed him and went quietly to her room. He told her that he would come to her presently, he had much to do. But when she made inquiries she found that he had ridden to Castle Crichton, where he still kept Jane Gordon, his first wife, so the Queen remained, restless, with the unborn child for company.

The Queen questioned Sir William Maitland curiously. She knew that both Bothwell and Huntly looked for a chance to murder him, so that while he stayed with her he was in peril of his life.

She asked him with a detached wonder why he remained. "You might join the Lords or my brother who is abroad. I suppose you are really of their party?"

"Of no party, madame," replied Maitland.

"Well, you cannot care for me," she said quietly. "I have no friends left. I am quite discrowned, am I not, Sir William?"

He replied softly: "I think so, madame."

Without surprise or offence she gazed at him. For many days he had seemed sick, his face was slightly tinged with yellow. Some slow disease was weakening him, but he was still quietly magnificent in

his attire, and, when amid her distractions she had spoken to him, still the splendid, witty companion.

"You report to my brother all my doings, you are allied with these rebel Lords?"

He bent his head without replying.

"We shall come to a battle, Sir William. On which side will you fight?"

"I would wish as long as it were possible to stay with the Queen's Grace."

"My husband would like to destroy you, Sir William."

"I have to thank Your Majesty for my life. Perhaps it was not much of a gift, madame, for the doctors do not give me a good report."

"Oh," she cried impatiently, "how little death matters/ A battle! I should like that!"

"You would be there?"

"Yes, indeed."

"What you fight for is of so little value, madame. Is Jane Gordon's husband worth the ruin of a kingdom?" She looked at him steadily.

"You have always understood me without any words."

"I love the Queen, madame," he replied quietly. "I serve the Queen."

"I think you have betrayed me many times, sold me to the English and the rebels." But she smiled. There was between them real friendship. "The Earl of Moray also loved the Queen." Her smiled

deepened as she added that.

"You had done well to take that love, it was the most worthwhile of any ever offered you--that and mine. We would have made you Queen and kept you Queen. But you, madame, rejected that."

She shrugged her shoulders. "Why, so I did, Sir William, and so it has come to this."

"Yes, madame, and you have lost everything."

"Am I come to that--nothing left, nothing at all?" He was silent. She accepted this answer and said:

"I suppose my brother will return? He counts on that--that and the child?"

"I think so, madame. You must foresee what will occur. Earl Bothwell has no friends in Scotland nor in Europe--"

"Save only one. I shall be faithful to him."

A change came over the sensitive face of Maitland. "You will do that, whatever happens? You would fail with him?"

"To any depth," she said.

"I am so glad," said Maitland. "Yes, that pleases me. I hope you will do it."

"Even though you loathe the man, even though he has ruined me and would murder you?"

"What does that matter? Be faithful to this man who is not faithful to you, madame. That is your only chance to redeem any of it."

That night Maitland left Holyrood secretly and joined the rebel Lords at Stirling.

The desertion of this subtle, cautious man, who had been faithful in spite of insults and danger, was like a signal. In twenty-four hours the palace was almost empty, so the Queen and her husband withdrew hastily from Edinburgh and went to the great fortress of Borthwick, where the Queen bade her subjects rally to her standard against the rebels, but few or none came to fight in such a cause.

Dressed as a cavalier she escaped by night from the castle as the Lords marched on it. In the attire of an Edinburgh citizeness she rode beside her husband at Carberry Hill, with such as could be induced to fight for her, behind her, and the banner on which was the Scottish Lion in his liliated border borne before. On the other side of the little stream that trickled across the summer fields was gathered the strength of Scotland. All day long the armies faced each other. The Queen's men did not want to fight, and little by little, some furtively, some openly, they went over to the Lords. The French Ambassador negotiated, challenges were passed, accepted, disputed, rejected, and at the end of the tedious, weary hours there was a conference.

Eventually the Ambassador came to the Queen and told her that the Lords would be satisfied with nothing less than vengeance on the murderers of the late King. Then they demanded the custody of the Prince, in whom the hope of the future lay; and thirdly, they insisted that the Queen should leave Earl Bothwell (they ignored his new title of duke), and deliver him and his more notable followers, such as Huntly, up to justice.

"M. du Croc," said the Queen, "you must see that this is fantastic. My husband has been cleansed of the crime of which he is accused, he has been selected by the Lords themselves as a suitable husband for me. And as for my abandoning him, I married this quarrel with

him."

"This is what they think. Will not Your Majesty have peace?" cried the Frenchman in despair.

"Let these rebellious subjects of mine," said the Queen, "acknowledge their faults and ask my pardon, and I am ready to receive them."

At this point Bothwell rode up with a little troop of horsemen. He had been engaged in riding round the scattered ranks and endeavouring to put some spirit and organization into them. In a loud voice he asked of Du Croc:

"Am I the one they want?"

"Sir," replied the Frenchman, coldly, "the Lords assure me they are the very humble subjects and servants of the Queen."

"And what for me?" cried the Queen's husband. "And what for me?"

Du Croc lowered his voice as he replied:

"Sir, they are your implacable enemies."

"There is none other like my lord on the other side," said the Queen. "If our men were faithful we should have the best of it, do not you think?"

"Truly, I think so, madame, but your forces melt away." At that Bothwell said:

"For God's sake, sir, think no more of me, but have pity on the Queen. For the honour of God, sir, see the trouble she is in."

The Frenchman was surprised at these words from the man of whom he had heard nothing but evil. He felt a deep pity, not only for the Queen who had tears in her eyes as he turned to bid her farewell, but also for the man who sat beside her, who seemed to take this great disaster almost as a joke.

Then, looking about him, he saw that the two armies were intermingling, and that the white standard with the body of the murdered man and the praying child painted upon it, was advancing slowly under the fading light. He said:

"All goes badly with you. Make what terms you can. Sir, if you have any pity for the Queen, my lord Duke, you will withdraw."

"I have offered," said Bothwell, "to fight any of them in single combat, but none will accept."

"It is too late," said Du Croc, with bitterness, "for such feats of arms. You will soon be in their power, and then nothing can save you."

"Oh, Jesu!" exclaimed the Queen, "is there not some means of making an agreement for the safety of the Duke?"

Du Croc shook his head.

"I have spoken to them for the space of three hours, but they have resolved to show no mercy there."

Then the Queen repeated in bewilderment:

"But they urged this marriage on him, on me!"

Du Croc smiled ironically. Poor woman, she had thought herself so clever with her tricks and subterfuges and lies. Had she not foreseen that trap?

"I think, madame, you scarcely know with whom you deal."

"With whom do I deal?"

"With these rebels, and Maitland and Moray." He bowed, and moved his horse away, weary from that long day's work.

"Moray," repeated Bothwell. "You should have allowed me to kill him. And his spy, Maitland."

The Queen looked round and saw an increasing disorder in her army. Her men were parleying with the Lords' troops, and over the rough ground the banner with the picture of the murdered man was advancing.

She sent a message imploring Sir William Maitland to come to her, but he would not. He sent a message to say that he was not with the Lords and therefore he was not able to treat for them.

She turned to Bothwell. He was putting on his helmet; framed in the visor his face still seemed amused, as if he found some humour even in his own failure.

"Madame," he said, "there are twenty-five or thirty who will follow me, and if I leave the rebels have promised to make fair terms for you. You will be the Queen again and they your humble servants. I can do nothing for you—I would have led your armies, but they have melted away. I would have fought for you in single combat, but no man will come forward."

"You are going?" she cried.

"To leave you free—to give you a chance."

"But I would like to come too, let me ride with you, even if I have nothing in the world but these clothes I stand in."

"Madame, it is impossible. I shall have to go to the Border, perhaps to the Islands."

"Well, then, I too," she thought. The force of her love was such that she closed her eyes and the tears ran down her face.

She felt him take her hand and kiss it. They had so little time--the banner with the body of the dead man upon it was being carried across the brook.

"Farewell, Mary. Maybe we shall meet again. Be faithful to me."

When she opened her eyes he had already turned his horse and was gone, with those thirty men closing behind him, towards Dunbar.

The Queen, on a violent impulse, turned her horse's head to follow him. It seemed to her that with him went all that she had left in the world, but those beside her caught her bridle and checked her and led her towards the army of the Lords so that the Banner of Scotland that followed her, came side by side with the Banner on which was depicted the naked body of Henry Stewart lying strangled beneath the bare orchard trees.

The Lords did not keep their promise to receive the Queen as their Sovereign. When she surrendered and disarmed, they made her their prisoner and without giving thought to her dignity or comfort turned towards Edinburgh. The man who had particular charge of her was Earl Morton whom she had always detested.

She kept her courage, trusting always to the future--her people of Edinburgh would not allow her to be treated with ignominy. When they reached the capital she would be lodged in the palace and Mary

Seaton and the French girls, perhaps Lady Argyll, would come to her; there would be rest, comfort. And when she had lost her fatigue and her terror she could send for Bothwell. Erect, smiling faintly, she rode amidst her enemies. She encouraged herself by thinking of Bothwell. He would be able to rescue her.

When they reached Edinburgh it was nearly dark and the Queen pulled a muffler round her face. The Lords marched in silence, continuing to carry in front of her the Banner with the two figures of father and son. She was now close enough to read on the scroll issuing from the child's mouth the words, "Judge, and avenge my cause, O Lord." It was the murderers themselves who carried this banner. She felt contempt for all of them, but unbidden, the austere image of Moray came into her mind.. Was he not behind all this, moving warily, secretly? Had he not from the first warned her--he had said that he would make her a queen, but that if she left him for other men...She closed her eyes; it seemed that if Moray had not been her brother she might have loved him and he might have saved her from all this. But as love was forbidden, hate had taken its place.

The armed men cleared the streets of Edinburgh before her. She discovered that they were not taking her to Holyrood, but lodging her in the Provost's House. She dismounted, still too proud to complain, still indomitable, and Morton led her up the stairway into a room that looked on the street.

"Is this for me?" she asked, peering in. The room was plainly furnished and she noted at once that it had no other exit than the door in which she stood.

"What will you do with me?" she asked.

"We must debate that."

She faced him and struggled to recapture the brave words and gestures.

"You have broken your word to me--all of you--I am not to be treated as a queen as you promised. But I am the Queen nevertheless, and my last words shall be those of a queen."

He smiled at her carelessly, then closed the door. Terror for a moment mastered her; she beat on the panels demanding liberty, or at least a woman, an apothecary, a priest. Then she controlled herself.

Of course she would not be left here long. Someone would rescue her--the Hamiltons, the Argylls, Atha, Huntly. Then she thought of Lennox, the English, and Moray, and her spirits sank again.

There were no curtains at the windows, and forcing herself to walk slowly, she went to one of these and looked out. A flutter of white, vivid in the light of the torches burning below, met her as she pressed her face to the pane. It was the Banner again, the Banner of the rebellious Lords. She drew back from the window, and went to the door, turning the handle, uselessly, for it was bolted outside. She heard the ring of iron on iron which told her there were armed men on guard.

There was no mirror in the room, but she knew that her face was dirty, that her hair was in a tangle. She stared with disgust at her hands, blistered on the palms from the hard gauntlets and holding the reins so long.

There was a noise in the street and she went to the window again and looked out--the other window this time, not that before which they had hung the banner. The light from torches and lanterns filled the street, which was crowded with people. She could see clearly the

upturned faces. What were they saying? She could not always understand the Scots tongue, but the meaning of the cry was clear enough:

"Kill! Kill! Burn! Burn! Slay the adulteress and murderess!"

The Queen was not afraid. She wanted to open the window, to call out to them, to justify herself, to say that she had no ill will to any of them, that she felt kindly towards Scotland, her ancient realm.

She fumbled with the bolt, but her weary fingers could not move it. She began to walk round the room. It was curious to be confined. She opened the chest in the corner and found it held the winter store of woollen hangings. She had no means of defence, no place to lie, no water; she beat on the door, asking for a drink of water. If only she could have Mary Seaton, the apothecary, or a priest. She went to the window again. A man was moving through the crowd which made way for him with respect. He looked up at her and she saw the worn face of Sir William Maitland. This time in her passionate flare of hope she found the force to burst the hasp of the casement open, and leaning out, she cried to Sir William to come up and speak to her, regardless of the hooting of the mob that went up at sight of her and the way they surged towards the door of the Provost's House.

But he turned away, pulling his hat over his face, and passed through the crowd.

Then the Queen drew back from the window and fell on her knees, her body pressed against the wall. If only she could have got to Inchmahome with Lady Reres and the French girls--if only she could be hidden somewhere till the child was born. She thought of Claude, the girl whom they had hanged for murdering her baby. How women suffered...where could she find help, where? Pain lapped at her like rising water. Her senses blurred and she sank forward into

unconsciousness.

When she came round she did not know if she had fainted or slept. It was dawn and light was growing in the half-furnished room.

No one had been near her, her lips were parched for lack of water, her hands dirty, her dress torn. She began to understand what was intended for her--the presence of Moray, implacable, monstrous, seemed to fill the room. She herself had signed the decree that gave death to the adulteress. Frenzy shook her--the stake, the axe, the rope.

She opened the window, the crowd was still below. She began to plead for pity, begging them to have mercy on her, to save her.

The door suddenly opened and she turned with such a vehement movement that she fell on to her knees.

It was Maitland who stood before her, and she remained on her knees staring at him and crying for pity. He made no attempt to comfort her and she began to threaten him as she had threatened Ruthven when David was killed.

"If you assist these rebels now, I shall know how to punish you. Ungrateful! Did I not save you from Huntly, and from my husband? I would I had let them slay you at my feet. You allow that flag to hang before my window, you allow them to keep me in this place, but you knew of it, you were an accessory to this murder of which there is such a clamour--you and Moray."

"But it is not I nor he whom it will destroy," replied Sir William.

"Let me go to my husband, only that! Where is he? At Dunbar?"

"Earl Bothwell has gone, perhaps to take farewell of his wife. He is a

wise man and knows when he is defeated."

"Farewell of his wife!" she repeated.

"Is it not known to all that the Earl still thinks himself married to Jane Gordon and holds the Queen's Grace only as his concubine?"

The Queen did not answer that. The noise in the street increased as armed men tried to push their way through the crowd to drive the people back to their homes.

"Where is my brother?"

"Madame, he has been sent for."

She began to weep again and said it was cruel to separate her from her husband, with whom she expected much happiness. She repeated passionately that she was married, and it might be that she would have another child, which would be dishonoured by this separation.

"Married six weeks!" said Maitland.

She then asked him why he had come to visit her since he had no comfort to give, and said that the sight of him offended her.

He said:

"Madame, if you could forsake Lord Bothwell there might be some pity for you."

"You told me, you yourself, that my one merit was in my fidelity to him."

"So I think."

"I love him and I shall be faithful to him."

"If you only did, if you only could! But if that were in you, you were not in this plight now."

"Yet to forsake him is my only hope of mercy?"

"Yes, madame, and therefore all the glorious action that is left you would be to cleave to him."

She said to him, crying:

"What do you know of glorious actions? You are a liar, a traitor. I wish I had allowed my husband to kill you. You are a very mean creature."

"Madame, I know it."

Her thoughts turned swiftly to her own desperate need. "What can you do for me?"

"I do not know, madame, everything is in the hands of. Lord Moray. I shall try to protect you till he comes."

"How coldly you speak! What do the people want?"

"Revenge for the death of the young man." Maitland added delicately. "Do you never weep for that?"

She laughed.

"There were so many young men who died bloodily. If I had begun to weep for them--! Save me! I never harmed you. And Moray would not wish me hurt."

"No, he would not wish that."

"Nor shamed." She seated herself on the edge of the bare bed. "You'll think me shamed enough. But--worse might happen." She forced herself to go on. "I need secrecy, rest, my women, my apothecary, do you understand? I was going to Inchmahome--but that is over. I am ready to die--but not that."

"I understand," said Sir William quietly. "I will do what I can."

With no more than that he left her.

In the Privy Council chamber in Holyrood House, Morton and the Lords debated what was to be done with the Queen. They were in half a mind to let the people have their way with her, to avenge the murder of the King. Then the country would be in peace and they could crown the young King. But Sir William Maitland said that it was Moray's wish that she should be saved. He was coming back and would himself decide her destiny. No one disputed Moray's will for in all their minds he was master.

That night, obeying the commands that Moray had long since sent to Maitland in readiness for such an emergency, they took the Queen with Mary Seaton and two other gentlewomen, secretly, and heavily guarded, to a castle that belonged to Lord Moray's mother, Margaret Douglas, called Lochleven.

In the tower of the castle the Queen lay for fifteen days desperately ill, only rousing now and then to drink a little water or, a glass of wine.

She was housed pleasantly and most of her household had been allowed to attend her; she wanted for nothing. These had been Earl Moray's commands--that she should want for nothing.

One night when the Queen had been at Lochleven for about three

weeks, Lady Douglas, walking on the ramparts in the twilight, heard a French song coming from the tower where the prisoner was confined. It faded away into shrieks which were quickly muffled.

She moved away and shut herself in her own apartment, not being willing to see or hear more, but from her window that night she saw a figure which she knew to be that of the Queen's apothecary trying to keep as close as possible to the shadow of the wall. Lady Douglas thought he had a bundle under his cloak.

John Knox returned to Edinburgh and after much conferring with Mr. Craig, the minister who had taken his place and who had refused, until he was forced, to obey the Queen's express command to publish the banns of her marriage with the Earl Bothwell, they published a Proclamation.

"We take no pleasure," said their Proclamation, "to deal with our Sovereign after this source as we are presently forced to do. We never were about in any wise to restrain her liberty, yet how horribly the King, Her Majesty's husband, was murdered, is a common fable throughout Christendom. How shamefully the Queen our Sovereign was led by fear, force, and other extraordinary and more unlawful means, even to become bedfellow to another wife's husband, to him who not three months before had in his bed most cruelly murdered her husband, is manifest to the world and to the great dishonour of Her Majesty, of us all, and this whole nation.

"What end think you could we have looked for the Earl of Bothwell in the progress of time, or in what bounds could his immoderate ambition have been concluded? What rested to finish the work begun, to accomplish the whole desire of his ambitious heart but to send the son after the father and it might be suspected, seeing him keep another wife in store, to make the Queen also drink of the same cup that in the end he might have possessed himself of the

Crown of the Realm, which behoves to be the mark he shot at, so that though by wicked means this purchase must seem by the light of men's favour."

Towards the end of the month, Lord Lindsay and Sir Robert Melville went to Lochleven to obtain the Abdication of the Queen. This was Moray's wish. She was to be completely overthrown, yet he would have no violence or force, and he commanded his wife, Agnes Keith, to go and attend on the Queen until his return.

The Queen lay in her bed, too weak to do more than raise herself on her elbow, which gave her a glimpse through the window of the grey waters of the lake, but she was relieved of her burden of shame and terror. She had not been able to save the child, but she had saved herself.

She tried to efface from her memory that awful night and the wretched creature that had never drawn breath as he lay ready to be buried. It had looked to her like Florestan, and she had cried out against their cruelty for murdering her son. She had meant to save the child, and have it secretly sent to France. But it had been born dead before its time; she believed that it had died within her while she was in the Provost House.

She had wept for the baby and begged them not to take it away. But as her strength returned she was glad to think that she had escaped the worse shame. She made no secret of her illness. The cruelty with which she had been treated had caused a miscarriage, she had lost her child, everyone ought to pity her distress.

While the Queen was still confined to bed a message was brought to her that she must instantly receive Lord Lindsay and young Lord Ruthven. She was told that they had come to receive her Abdication. She must sign three documents: One contained her consent to the

government of her son and the total relinquishing of her own rights in Scotland. In the second she gave the Regency to the Earl of Moray, and the third named other Lords for this position in case Moray should refuse the dignity.

The Queen whispered from the bed: "What will they do if I will not sign?"

Agnes Keith slipped into her hand a letter in a cipher that was familiar to her—it was Sir William Maitland's.

Propping herself upon her elbow she read it—a plea to her to do as the Lord asked in every respect. All her chances in the kingdom were totally lost and there was nothing she could save but her life, and that only by complete submission, while afterwards she could repudiate her Abdication as wrested from her by force.

The Queen put the letter down, puzzling over Maitland—was he friend or enemy? It hardly mattered, the advice was good and she thought that she saw Moray behind it—Moray, who did not wish her to be utterly destroyed.

If she would not sign the document they had, Lindsay told her bluntly, several expedients to destroy her. Had it not been for Moray's device to send her to this water-ringed fortress, the people of Scotland would have destroyed her before. John Knox daily preached that a plague rested on the country while she lived, that the blood of Henry Stewart cried aloud for vengeance, and brought a curse on those who hesitated to kill his murderers.

"Oh, that!" said the Queen. "Have we not had many such murders in Scotland?"

"There is none," replied Lindsay, "that has so shaken the mind of the

people."

He continued to speak against her, holding the papers through the bed-curtains, but she did not listen, for his voice was offensive to her. She peered over his shoulder at the young face of Ruthven. Mary Seaton had told her that this Lord was sorry for her, and had taken some of her messages to the English and the French envoys, and for that had been removed from among her guards. She closed her eyes. They took her silence for an obstinate refusal, and Melville, who had smuggled in the warning from Sir William Maitland, was distressed at her stubbornness--he feared for her life. Who was there in Scotland who would blame these men if they killed her?

"You are rebels and traitors and cowards!" whispered the Queen, weakly, "and I will not give up the estate to which God called me. As for the murder of my husband--" She opened her eyes and looked up at them, still prone on the pillows, too weak to move: "I am innocent," she said.

Lindsay glanced at Ruthven and said sourly:

"Madame, when Earl Bothwell fled from Holyrood he left certain letters behind. They are in the possession of Earl Morton. You wrote them when you were at Glasgow with the King, the man who took them to Earl Bothwell was Nicolas Hubert."

The Queen was silent. Then she said: "The letters are forgeries."

"You would have to prove that," said Lindsay, "and once they were published, I think it would matter very little whether you wrote them or no."

Melville impatiently lifted the curtain higher and stared down at her:

"Sign, madame, for God's sake."

She called Mary Seaton to raise her up in bed. They put the papers on her knees and brought her an inkhorn and quill. She had never meant to do this, it had been her intention to die splendidly. If only they had let her go with Bothwell, to ride north beside him and take ship with him away from all of them. But she had not had that choice.

She signed her name three times. Then, while Lindsay took the documents, she lay down, gently assisted by Mary Seaton and hid her face in the pillows, without hope, almost without life.

"Madame," whispered Mary Seaton, "Lord Moray is coming to Lochleven!"

These words came joyfully to the Queen, who since she had signed the Act of Abdication, had lain listlessly in bed.

"Oh, Mary!" Blood faintly tinged her face. "This is an answer to prayer, this is God's protection of the innocent."

"Why, madame, do you think my lord will do anything for you?"

"He has come!" said the Queen. "He cannot keep away, you see! He has everything, now, Mary, everything that was mine--the kingdom, the child, the affection of my subjects, my armed men, my forts and ships, all, all this and he has no need to think of me any more, but he has come, he has come, Mary!" She added, "What have we here for clothes and attire and jewels?"

"Very little, madame. There was one chest sent, but it has nothing but plain mourning robes and veils."

"That will not do," said the Queen impatiently. "Am I allowed to send letters?"

"I believe so, madame, if Sir William Douglas sees them first."

"Well, he shall take no exception to this, it is not a conspiracy. Write to Sir Robert Melville."

Mary Seaton ventured to murmur: "He is no longer your Lord Chamberlain, madame, and would scarcely do your bidding."

"No matter for that. Tell him to go to Servais de Condè. Even if he is not," she added, smiling, "still the Keeper of my Wardrobe, yet he must know where my clothes are. I will have a white satin gown and one of a carnation colour and one of black. And while you write have some silk and taffeta and satin for our embroideries, and twists of silk thread. And some clothes for yourselves, I marvel he has not sent before, you are ragged, Mary."

By Earl Moray's wish the Queen's properties and fineries were sent from Holyrood to Lochleven. He was insistent that these should be in her possession before his arrival at the island fortress, for he did not wish to see her humiliated. He thought that he could scarcely have endured to see her as she must have appeared after Carberry Hill, and he hated those who had seen her half naked, with streaming hair and disfigured face, screaming from the window of the Provost's House. All that should have been spared. He blamed and hated Morton for it, and himself for staying away too long.

He arrived at Lochleven with Lord Atholl and Earl Morton, and all three were admitted immediately into the presence of the Queen. She ignored the others coming straight to him to take his hand, and he allowed her to lead him apart. And then he looked at her, first at the hand held in his, then at her ruffled sleeve of white satin and then up to her face. She was not in mourning (he thought she should have been), but she wore a robe that he remembered from Holyrood and was again in possession of her smooth beauty.

"Madame," he said, "I have nothing to say that the others may not hear," and he turned to include them in the conversation. The Queen said: "You are master of us all." And ignoring the other two, she asked him what he intended to do with her? Earl Moray answered her covertly, evading a plain issue. He was wondering if she hated him, he was recalling how she hunted him from the kingdom, forbidding anyone to give him even a bowl of porridge.

The Queen began to weep, softly, into her gold-edged handkerchief, and he turned aside to the other two who stared at her with grim hostility. Morton, at least, was determined to have her life. Moray resented that look of contempt on the Red Earl's face, and he ordered his sister to have her supper apart, not wishing to expose her to the gibes of Morton.

After supper he went into her apartment again. When he entered she looked up and said:

"You've had all of me--I am at your mercy."

Walking up and down the room, he began to reproach her with her misconduct. The Queen wept bitterly. And at last, seeing the uselessness of this criticism he paused before her and asked her what she hoped from him.

She demanded her liberty, her realm, and her son.

At which he exclaimed:

"Is it possible that you do not realize even now the trouble you are in? That your life hangs on a thread, and that only my return to Scotland and the instances of Queen Elizabeth's Ambassador have saved you?"

She began to flatter him, calling him powerful, merciful. She reminded him that it was in his power not only to save her but to put her where she had been before.

But he denied this, saying:

"Even your liberty is not in my power, Fix your hopes in God's mercy for there, surely, is your safest refuge." Then sighed, and added:

"I will assure you of your life and as much as lies in me of the preservation of your honour, but as for your liberty, it is not, I say, in my power. Nor is it good for you to seek it nor to have it for many reasons."

"I hope," said the Queen quietly, "you will not refuse the Regency, but accept it as my desire."

"You wish that?" he asked.

"Why, surely," said she, in a broken voice, "for if you are Regent my son shall be preserved, my realm well-governed, and I in safety and able to enjoy more liberty than I should have any other way. And I hope," said she with a sigh, "you will get all the forces of the realm into your hands for I know there is none I can trust but you."

He did not answer this and she began to plead with him. Might she not have her son?

"Ah, madame," said he, stung by what seemed her incredible lightness, "do you not realize that you are balladed up and down this country? God forbid that I should shame my mouth and your ears by repeating the words they say of you."

"I have been most foully slandered. Never has a princess been so outraged."

"You are not on trial, nor I your judge." He looked at her inquisitively. "Do you never think of the late King?"

"Why do you ask me that?" asked the Queen, unmoved. "Do you think to convict me of cruelty?"

"Ah, madame, you harden your heart. You have learnt this attitude from Earl Bothwell. I suppose you would be with him now—an outlaw on the high seas."

Her face became pinched with longing.

"I would indeed follow him to the ends of the earth."

"Well, madame, this inordinate affection will be your ruin. Listen. I have given you, madame, assurance for your life, and I intend to spend my own to save you, employing all my power to that purpose. It does not rest with me only. I think a while ago I warned you?"

"Oh," said she, plaintively, "this talk is nothing but a recital of my faults."

"I must tell you, madame, why you are in jeopardy. Your existence disturbs the quiet of the realm, and the reign of your son; your possible attempts to escape from where you are, your appeals to the Queen of England or the French King to molest this realm inflame the people, your passion for the Earl Bothwell disgusts all."

"Well," said the Queen, meekly, sinking back into her chair so that the candlelight did not reach her face, "what may I do to amend these faults?"

Moray looked away, resisting that magic she had for him and which he now believed to be wholly evil. Moray knew of the birth of the child

in Lochleven, as he knew of everything that happened to the Queen. Maitland had told him that only her imprisonment had saved her from the people who would have burnt her as a witch, and adulteress.

To test her he asked:

"Would you, to regain your Crown, forsake your husband, as you call Bothwell?"

The Queen was silent. She thought with regret of the man, but her sense of loss grew less every day. Besides, he was so far away, he had not sent to her--how could she be faithful to a mere memory?

She lifted her shoulder without replying. Moray was answered. She knew nothing of love nor fidelity. Maitland had said, "A goddess or a slut? Upon my word, I don't know."

"Nor I," thought Moray. She was in his power, though he had disclaimed that, he could do with her exactly as he pleased, there was no one in Scotland would dare to withstand him. There were so many secret ways by which he might come to his desire.

He stared at her, so lovely, so corrupt, waiting his pleasure, waiting his permission to be gay and kind. How happy he could make her. Yet, without a doubt she hated him, the only man who had ever mastered her--to quiet his own thoughts he began to admonish her; he spoke like a priest, like a ghostly confessor:

"To preserve yourself, you must acknowledge your sins before God. You must make it appear that you detest your former life and intend a more modest behaviour. Ay, madame, and make at least an apparent show that you abhor the murder of your husband and dislike your former life with Earl Bothwell. And last, you must make it clear to all that you intend no revenge on the Lords who have sought

your reformation and preservation."

The Queen showed no resentment at these grim reprimands. She sighed faintly and stirred a little in the shadows of the great chair as he approached her. His virtue was forgotten--there was no woman like her. As he bent over her she opened her eyes, and said very gently:

"I thank you for all your care of me here, for the kindness you had in sending me your lady mother and your lady wife to hold me company, for the clothes, and all you allowed me to have."

"I have done what I could for you."

She caught him by the arm as he stood by the side of her chair.

"Sweet James, could you not set me up again? You and I could rule together. I would give everything into your hands, you know you offered this once. Set me free and I shall not offend you again. James, I love you, my brother, my protector. There shall never be another man--I have done with lovers."

She spoke humbly, her eyes were pleading. When she thought he hesitated, half-seduced, she put more passion into her entreaties and drew closer to him, finally throwing herself against his breast, sobbing, imploring.

"We are of the same family, we ought to understand, to help one another. I have been so unfortunate."

If he left her now he would lose her for ever, he would never see her again. She would wither slowly in an unvisited prison.

Alarmed at his silence, at his frowns (for he was her only hope), she put her arms round his neck and tried to draw his face down towards

hers, as she pleaded for pardon, for mercy.

Moray shuddered as he untwisted her fingers from behind his neck.

"Don't go! Don't go!"

But he put her away from him and said:

"Madame, I can answer for your life--for the rest, I commend you to God."

He set her back in her chair and turned towards the door, a man walking away from temptation. As he fumbled with the door handle, not yet in command of himself, he heard her speak again out of the shadow behind him. It was as if another woman was in the room, so altered was the ironic voice that said:

"Farewell, my bastard brother."

With the departure of the Earl Moray from her prison, the Queen's last hope was gone. She fell again into the apathy from which her attendants could not arouse her, not even Mary Seaton.

She was allowed her books, her music, and her embroidery, but she took no more pleasure in any of them, or in the fine clothes from Holyrood. Without delight the future hung before her, tedious, melancholy. She was to have her life, perhaps some dignity and respect, but she was to be a prisoner in this fortress forever round which the grey water flowed.

Would it not be preferable to die?

She was so young, there might be years of this. She had no chance even to write a letter, she was kept without news. Even if her friends intrigued or fought for her she would never hear of it. They had

crowned her son in her stead--yes, she would prefer to die.

"I have been trying to get you some roses," said Mary Seaton, worn with tears and prayers, still full of devotion for her mistress. "I thought if you could see a few roses--"

"There are none here. It is too far north, too late in the year."

"Yes there are one or two little bushes with blooms. When I was out yesterday I wanted to pluck them for you, but Lady Douglas was watching--"

"Roses at Lochleven!"

"If you would only go out, even on the ramparts, you would see them."

The Queen shook her head on the pillow.

"Look at least from the window," pleaded Mary Seaton. "Look on the water and the sky. Rise up from your bed, madame, and breathe the fresher air."

The Queen, wearied by this nagging, got up, and leaning on Mary Seaton's arm, went to the window which looked upon a little enclosed grass, then on to the outer ramparts and beyond that the lake.

The Queen looked down into the garden where a few poor red roses bloomed on long stems.

A tall young man was walking pensively up and down the narrow path.

"Who is he? I do not seem to have noticed him before."

"That is George Douglas, madame, Sir William's brother. He has been kept away from us."

"Moray's half-brother," said the Queen curiously. "Perhaps he will gather some roses, Mary."

At the sound of her voice, the young man in the garden glanced up eagerly. The Queen stared from the window of her prison, then moved into the room.

"I will, after all, walk by the lake. The gown with the ruffled sleeves--that I wore for Lord Moray."

He had looked at her as if he were already deeply in love, Moray's half-brother, George Douglas.

The Queen laughed.

THE END

*This site is full of FREE ebooks - Project Gutenberg Australia
<http://gutenberg.net.au>*