ing was keen, but was glad of it in view of her treatment of Brandon.

A day or two after Brandon's liberation I had begun to speak of him to the girls, but he interrupted me with a frightful oath: "Caskoden, you are my friend, but if you ever mention their names again in my hearing you are my friend no longer. I will curse you."

I was frightened, so much stronger did his nature show than mine, and took good care to remain silent on that subject until—but I am going too fast again; I will tell you of that hereafter.

Upon the morning appointed the King, Wolsey, De Longueville and myself, with a small retinue, rode over to Windsor, where we found that Mary, anticipating us, had barricaded herself in her bedroom and refused to receive the announcement. The King went upstairs to coax at the fair young besieged through two inches of oak door and to induce her if possible to come down. We below could plainly hear the King pleading in the voice of a Bashan bull, and it afforded us some amusement behind our hands. Then his Majesty grew angry and threatened to break down the door, but the fair besieged maintained a more persistent and provoking silence throughout it all, and allowed him to carry out his threat without so much as a whimper. He was thoroughly angry, and called to us to come up to see him "compel obedience from the self-willed hussy"—a task the magnitude of which he underrated.

The door was soon broken down, and the King walked in first, with De Longueville and Wolsey next, and the rest of us following in close procession. But we marched over broken walls to the most laughable defeat ever suffered by besieging army. Our foe, though small, was altogether too fertile in expedients for us. There seemed no way to conquer this girl; her resources were so inexhaustible that in the moment of your expected victory success was turned into defeat; nay, more, ridiculous disaster.

We found Jane crouching on the floor in a corner half dead with fright from the noise and tumult—and where do you think we found her mistress? Frightened? Not at all; she was lying in bed with her face to the wall, as cool as a January morning, her clothing in a little heap in the middle of the room.

Without turning her head, she exclaimed: "Come in, brother; you are quite welcome. Bring in your friends. I am ready to receive them, though not in court attire, as you see." And she thrust her bare arm straight up from the bed to prove her words. You should have seen the Frenchman's little black eyes gloat on its beauty.

Mary went on, still looking toward the wall: "I will arise and receive you all informally, if you will but wait."

This disconcerted the imperturbable Henry, who was about at his wit's end.

"Cover that arm, you hussy!" he cried in a flaming rage.

"Be not impatient, brother mine. I will jump out in just a moment."

A little scream from Jane startled everybody, and she quickly sat up to the King, saying: "I beg your Majesty to go. She will do as she says so sure as you remain; you don't know her. She is very angry. Please go. I will bring her downstairs somehow."

"Ah, indeed! Jane Bolingbroke," came from the bed, "I will receive my guests myself when they are kind enough to come to my room." The coverlid began to move, and whether or not she was really going to carry out her threat I cannot say, but Henry, knowing her too well to risk it, hurried us all out of the room and marched downstairs at the head of his defeated cohorts. He was swearing in a way to make a priest's flesh creep and protesting by everything holy that Mary should be the wife of Louis or die. He went back to Mary's room at intervals, but there was enough persistence in that one girl to stop the wheels of time, if she but set herself to do it, and the King came away from each visit the victim of another rout.

Finally his anger cooled and he became amused. From the last visit he came down laughing.

"I shall have to give up the fight or else put my armor on with visor down," said he. "It is not safe to go near her without it; she is a very vixen, and but now tried to scratch my eyes out."

Wolsey, who had a wonderful knack for finding the easiest means to a difficult end, took Henry off to a window, where they held a whispered conversation.

It was pathetic to see a mighty King and his great Minister of State consulting and planning against one poor girl. And, as angry as I felt toward Mary, I could not help pitying her, and admired beyond the power of pen to write the valiant and so far impregnable defense she had put up against an array of strength that would have made a king tremble on his throne.

Presently Henry gave one of his loud laughs and slapped his thigh as if highly satisfied with some proposition of Wolsey's.

"Make ready at once," he said. "We will go back to London."

In a short time we were all at the main stairway ready to mount for the return trip.

The Lady Mary's window was just above, and I saw Jane watching us as we rode away.

After we were well out of Mary's sight the King called me to him, and he, together with De Longueville, Wolsey and myself, turned our horses' heads, rode rapidly by a circuitous path back to another door of the castle and re-entered without the knowledge of any of the inmates.

We four remained in silence, enjoined by the King, and in the course of an hour the Princess, supposing every one had gone, came downstairs and walked into the room where we were waiting.

It was a scurvy trick, and I felt a contempt for the men who had planned it. I could see that Mary's first impulse was to beat a hasty retreat back into her citadel, the bed, but in truth she had in her make-up very little disposition to retreat. She was clear grit. What a man she would have made! But what a crime it would have been in nature to have spoiled so perfect a woman. How beautiful she was! She threw one quick, surprised glance at her brother and his companions and lifting up her exquisite head carelessly hummed a little tune under her breath as she marched to the other end of the room with a gait that Juno herself could not have improved upon.

I saw the King smile, half in pride of her and half in amusement, and the Frenchman's little eyes feasted upon her beauty with a relish that could not be mistaken.

Henry and the Embassador spoke a word in whispers, when the latter took a box from a huge side pocket and started across the room toward Mary, with the King at his heels.

Her side was toward them when they came up, but she kept her attitude as if she had been of bronze. She had taken up a book that was lying on the table and was examining it as they approached.

De Longueville held the box in his hand and, bowing and scraping, said in broken English: "Permit to me, most gracious Princess, that I may have the honor to offer on behalf of my august master this little testament of his high admiration and love." With this he bowed again, smiled like a crack in a piece of old parchment and held his box toward Mary. It was open, probably in the hope of enticing her with a sight of its contents—a beautiful diamond necklace.

She turned her face ever so little and took it all in with one contemptuous, sneering glance out of the corners of her eyes. Then quickly reaching out her hand she grasped the necklace and deliberately dashed it in poor old De Longueville's face.

"There is my answer, sir! Go home and tell your imbecile old master I scorn his suit and hate him—hate him—hate him!" Then with the tears falling unheeded down her cheeks: "Master Wolsey, thou butcher's cur! This trick was of your conception. The others had not brains enough to think of it. Are you not proud to have outwitted one poor heart-broken girl? But beware, sir; I tell you now I will be quits with you yet, or my name is not Mary."

There is a limit to the best of feminine nerve, and at that limit should always be found a flood of healthful tears. Mary had reached it when she threw the necklace and shot her bolt at Wolsey, so she broke down and hastily left the room.

The King, of course, was beside himself with rage.

"By God's soul," he swore, "she shall marry Louis of France or I will have her whipped to death on the Smithfield pillory." And in his wicked heart—so impervious to a single lasting good impulse—he really meant it.

Immediately after this the King, De Longueville and Wolsey set out for London.

I remained behind hoping to see the girls, and after a short time a page plucked me by the sleeve, saying the Princess wished to see me.

The page conducted me to the same room in which had been fought the battle with Mary in bed. The door had been placed on its hinges again, but the bed was tumbled as Mary had left it, and the room was in great disorder.

"Oh, Sir Edwin," began Mary, who was weeping, "was ever woman in such frightful trouble? My brother is killing me. Can he not see that I could not live through a week of this marriage? And I have been deserted by all my friends, too, excepting Jane. She, poor thing, cannot leave."

"You know I would not go," said Jane, parenthetically. Mary continued: "You, too, have been home an entire week and have not been near me."

I began to soften at the sight of her grief, and concluded, with Brandon, that after all her beauty could well cover a multitude of sins; perhaps even this, her great transgression against him.

The Princess was trying to check her weeping, and in a moment took up the thread of her unfinished sentence: "And Master Brandon, too, left without so much as sending me one little word—not a line nor syllable. He did not come near me, but went off as if I did not care—or he did not. Of course he did not care, or he would not have behaved so, knowing I was in so much trouble. I did not see him at all after—one afternoon in the King's—about a week before that awful night in London, except that night, when I was so frightened I could not speak one word of all the things I wished to say."

That sounded strange enough, and I began more than ever to suspect something wrong. I, however, kept as firm a grasp as possible upon the stock of indignation I had brought with me.

"How did you expect to see or hear from him," asked I, "when he was lying in a loathsome dungeon without one ray of light, condemned to be hanged, drawn and quartered, because of your selfish neglect to save him who, at the cost of half his blood, and almost his life, had saved so much for you?"

Her eyes grew big and the tears were checked by genuine surprise.

I continued: "Lady Mary, no one could have made me believe that you would stand back and let the man, to whom you owed so great a debt, lie so long in such misery and be condemned to such a death for the act that saved you. I could never have believed it!"

"Imp of hell!" screamed Mary; "what tale is this you bring to torture me? Have I not enough already? Tell me it is a lie, or I will have your miserable little tongue torn out by the root."

"It is no lie, Princess, but an awful truth and a frightful shame to you."

I was determined to tell her all and let her see herself as she was.

She gave a hysterical laugh, and throwing up her hands, with her accustomed little gesture, fell upon the bed in utter abandonment, shaking as with a spasm. She did not weep; she could not; she was past that now. Jane went over to the bed and tried to soothe her.

In a moment Mary sprang to her feet, exclaiming: "Master Brandon condemned to death and you and I here talking and moaning and weeping? Come, come, we will go to the King at once. We will start to walk, Edwin—I must be doing something—and Jane can follow with the horses and overtake us. No; I will not dress; just as I am; this will do. Bring me a hat, Jane; any one, any one." While putting on hat and gloves she continued: "I will see the King at once and tell him all! all! I will do anything; I will marry that old King of France, or forty kings, or forty devils; it's all one to me; anything! anything! to save him. Oh! to think that he has been in that dungeon all this time." And the tears came unheeded in a deluge.

She was under such headway and spoke and moved so rapidly that I could not stop her until she was nearly ready to go. Then I held her by the arm while I said:

"It is not necessary now; you are too late."

A look of horror came into her face, and I continued slowly: "I procured Brandon's release nearly a week ago; I did what you should have done, and he is now at our rooms in Greenwich."

Mary looked at me a moment and, turning pale, pressed her hands to her heart and leaned against the door frame.

After a short silence she said: "Edwin Caskoden—fool! Why could you not have told me that at first? I thought my brain would burn and my heart burst."

"I should have told you had you given me time. As to the pain it gave you—" this was the last charge of my large magazine of indignation—"I care very little about that. You deserve it. I do not know what explanation you have to offer, but nothing can excuse you. An explanation, however good, would have been little comfort to you had Brandon failed you in Billingsgate that night."

She had fallen into a chair by this time and sat in reverie, staring at nothing. Then the tears came again, but more softly.

"You are right; nothing can excuse me. I am the most selfish, ungrateful, guilty creature ever born. A whole month in that dungeon!" And she covered her drooping face with her hands.

"Go away for a while, Edwin, and then return; we shall want to see you again," said Jane.

Upon my return Mary was more composed. Jane had dressed her hair and she was sitting on the bed in her riding habit, hat in hand. Her fingers were nervously toying at the ribbons and her eyes cast down.

"You are surely right, Sir Edwin. I have no excuse. I can have none; but I will tell you how it was. You remember the day you left me in the waiting-room of the King's council?—when they were discussing my marriage without one thought of me, as if I were but a slave or a dumb brute that could not feel." She began to weep a little, but soon recovered herself. "While waiting for you to return the Duke of Buckingham came in. I knew Henry was trying to sell me to the French King and my heart was full of trouble—from more causes than you can know. All the council, especially that butcher's son, were urging him on and Henry himself was anxious that the marriage should be brought about. He thought it would strengthen him for the imperial crown. He wants everything and is ambitious to be Emperor. Emperor! He would cut a pretty figure! I hoped, though, I should be able to induce him not to sacrifice me to his selfish interests, as I have done before, but I knew only too well it would tax my powers to the utmost this time. I knew that if I did anything to anger or antagonize him it would be all at an end with me. You know he is so exacting with other people's conduct, for one who is so careless of his own—so virtuous by proxy. You remember how cruelly he disgraced and crushed poor Lady Chesterfield, who was in such trouble about her husband, and who went to Grouche's only to learn if he were true to her. Henry seems to be particularly sensitive in that direction. One would think it was in the commandments: 'Thou shalt not go to Grouche's.' It may be that some have gone there for other purposes than to have their fortunes told—to meet, to—but I need not say that I—" and she stopped short, blushing to her hair.

"Well, I knew I could do nothing with Henry if he once learned of that visit, especially as it resulted so fatally. Oh! why did I go? Why did I go? That was why I hesitated to tell Henry at once. I was hoping some other way would open whereby I might save Charles—Master Brandon. While I was waiting along came the Duke of Buckingham, and as I knew he was popular in London and had almost as much influence there as the King, a thought came to me that he might help us.

"I knew that he and Master Brandon had passed a few angry words at one time in my ballroom—you remember—but I also knew that the Duke was in—in love with me, you know, or pretended to be—he always said he was—and I felt sure I could, by a little flattery, induce him to do anything. He was always protesting that he would give half his blood to serve me. As if anybody wanted a drop of his wretched blood. Poor Master Brandon! his blood—" and the tears came, choking her words for the moment. "So I told the Duke I had promised you and Jane to procure Master Brandon's liberty and asked him to do it for me. He gladly consented and gave me his knightly word that it should be attended to without an hour's delay. He said it might have to be done secretly in the way of an escape—not officially—as the Londoners were very jealous of their rights and much aroused on account of the killing. Especially, he said, that at that time great caution must be used, as the King was anxious to conciliate the city in order to procure a loan for some purpose—my dower, I suppose.

"The Duke said it should be as I wished; that Master Brandon should escape, and remain away from London for a few weeks until the King procured his loan, and then be freed by royal proclamation.

"I saw Buckingham the next day, for I was very anxious, you may be sure, and he said the keeper of Newgate had told him that it had been arranged the night before as desired. I had come to Windsor because it was more quiet, and my heart was full. It is quite a distance from London, and I thought it might afford a better opportunity to—to see—I thought, perhaps Master Brandon might come—might want to—to—see Jane and me; in fact I wrote him before I left Greenwich that I would be here. Then I heard he had gone to New Spain. Now you see how all my troubles have come upon me at once; and this the greatest of them, because it is my fault. I can ask no forgiveness from any one, for I cannot forgive myself."

She then inquired about Brandon's health and spirits, and I left out no distressing detail you may be sure.

During my recital she sat with downcast eyes and tear-stained face, playing with the ribbons of her hat.

When I was ready to go she said: "Please say to Master Brandon I should like—to see—him, if he cares to come, if only that I may tell him how it happened."

"I greatly fear, in fact, I know he will not come," said I. "The cruelest blow of all, worse even than the dungeon, or the sentence of death, was your failure to save him. He trusted you so implicitly. At the time of his arrest he refused to allow me to tell the King, saying he knew you would see to it—that you were pure gold."

"Ah, did he say that?" she asked, as a sad little smile lighted her face.

"His faith was so entirely without doubt that his recoil from you is correspondingly great. He goes to New Spain as soon as his health is recovered sufficiently for him to travel."

This sent the last fleck of color from her face, and with the words almost choking her throat: "Then tell him what I have said to you and perhaps he will not feel so—"

"I cannot do that either, Lady Mary. When I mentioned your name the other day he said he would curse me if I ever spoke it again in his hearing."

"Is it so bad as that?" Then meditatively: "And at his trial he did not tell the reason for the killing? Would not compromise me, who had served him so ill, even to save his own life? Noble, noble!" And her lips went together as she rose to her feet. No tears now; nothing but glowing, determined womanhood.

"Then I will go to him wherever he may be. He shall forgive me, no matter what my fault."

Soon after this we were on our way to London at a brisk gallop.

We were all very silent, but at one time Mary spoke up from the midst of a reverie: "During the moment when I thought Master Brandon had been executed—when you said it was too late—it seemed that I was born again and all made over; that I was changed in the very texture of my nature by the shock, as they say the grain of the iron cannon is sometimes changed by too violent explosion." And this proved to be true in some respects.

We rode on rapidly and did not stop in London except to give the horses drink.

After crossing the bridge Mary said, half to Jane and half to herself: "I will never marry the French King—never." Mary was but a girl pitted against a body of brutal men, two of them rulers of the two greatest nations on earth—rather heavy odds, for one woman.

We rode down to Greenwich and entered the palace without exciting comment, as the Princess was in the habit of going and coming at will.

The King and Queen and most of the courtiers were in London—at Bridewell and Baynard Castle—where Henry was vigorously pushing the loan of five hundred thousand crowns for Mary's dower, the only business of state in which, at that time, he took any active interest. Subsequently, as you know, he became interested in the divorce laws, and the various methods whereby a man, especially a King, might rid himself of a distasteful wife; and after he saw the truth in Anne Boleyn's eyes, he adopted a combined policy of church and state craft that has brought us a deal of senseless trouble ever since—and is like to keep it up.

As to Mary's dower, Henry was to pay Louis only four hundred thousand crowns, but he made the marriage an excuse for an extra hundred thousand, to be devoted to his own private use.

When he arrived at the palace the girls went their apartments and I to mine, where I found Brandon reading. There was only one window to our common room—a dormer window, set into the roof, and reached by a little passage as broad as the window itself, and perhaps a yard and a half long. In the alcove thus formed was a bench along the wall, cushioned by Brandon's great campaign cloak. In this window we often sat and read, and here was Brandon with his book. I had intended to tell him the girls were coming, for when Mary asked me if I thought he would come to her at the palace and when I had again said no, she reiterated her intention of going to him at once; but my courage failed me and I did not speak of it.

I knew that Mary ought not to come to our room, and that if news of it should reach the King's ears there would be more and worse trouble than ever, and, as usual, Brandon would pay the penalty for all. Then again, if it were discovered it might seriously compromise both Mary and Jane, as the world is full of people who would rather say and believe an evil thing of another than to say their prayers or believe the holy creed.

I had said as much to the Lady Mary when she expressed her determination to go to Brandon. She had been in the wrong so much of late that she was humbled, and I was brave enough to say whatever I felt; but she said she had thought it all over, and as every one was away from Greenwich it would not be found out if done secretly.

She told Jane she need not go; that she, Mary, did not want to take any risk of compromising her.

You see, trouble was doing a good work in the Princess, and had made it possible for a generous thought for another to find spontaneous lodgment in her heart. What a great thing it is, this human suffering, which so sensitizes our sympathy and makes us tender to another's pain. Nothing else so fits us for earth or prepares us for heaven.

Jane would have gone, though, had she known that all her fair name would go with her. She was right, you see, when she told me, while riding over to Windsor, that should Mary's love blossom into a full-grown passion she would wreck everything and everybody, including herself perhaps, to attain the object of so great a desire.

It looked now as if she were on the high road to that end. Nothing short of chains and fetters could have kept her from going to Brandon that evening. There was an inherent force about her that was irresistible and swept everything before it.

In our garret she was to meet another will, stronger and infinitely better controlled than her own, and I did not know how it would all turn out.

CHAPTER XII.

ATONEMENT.

I had not been long in the room when a knock at the door announced the girls. I admitted them, and Mary walked to the middle of the floor. It was just growing dark and the room was quite dim, save at the window where Brandon sat reading. Gods! those were exciting moments; my heart beat like a woman's. Brandon saw the girls when they entered, but never so much as looked up from his book. You must remember he had a great grievance. Even looking at it from Mary's side of the case, certainly its best point of view, he had been terribly misused, and it was all the worse that the misuse had come from one who, from his standpoint, had pretended to love him, and had wantonly led him on, as he had the best of right to think, to love her, and to suffer the keenest pangs a heart can know. Then you must remember he did not know even the best side of the matter, bad as it was, but saw only the naked fact, that in recompense for his great help in time of need Mary had deliberately allowed him to lie in that dungeon a long, miserable month, and would have suffered him to die. So it was no wonder his heart was filled with bitterness toward her, Jane and I had remained near the door, and poor Mary was a pitiable Princess, standing there so full of doubt in the middle of the room. After a moment she stepped toward the window and, with quick coming breath, stopped at the threshold of the little passage.

"Master Brandon, I have come not to make excuses, for nothing can excuse me, but to tell you how it all happened—by trusting to another."

Brandon arose and, marking the place in his book with his finger, followed Mary, who had stepped backward into the room.

"Your Highness is very gracious and kind thus to honor me, but as our ways will hereafter lie as far apart as the world is broad I think it would have been far better had you refrained from so imprudent a visit, especially as anything one so exalted as yourself may have to say can be no affair of such as I—one just free of the hangman's noose."

"Oh! don't! I pray you. Let me tell you, and it may make a difference. It must pain you, I know, to think of me as you do, after—after—you know; after what has passed between us."

"Yes; that only makes it all the harder. If you could give your kisses—" and she blushed red as blood—"to one for whom you care so little that you could leave him to die like a dog, when a word from you would have saved him, what reason have I to suppose they are not for every man?"

This gave Mary an opening of which she was quick enough to take advantage, for Brandon was in the wrong.

"You know that is not true. You are not honest with me nor with yourself, and that is not like you. You know that no other man ever had, or could have, any favor from me, even the slightest. Wantonness is not among my thousand faults. It is not that which angers you. You are sure enough of me in that respect. In truth, I had almost come to believe you were too sure, that I had grown cheap in your eyes, and you did not care so much as I thought and hoped for what I had to give, for after that day you came not near me at all. I know it was the part of wisdom and prudence that you should remain away; but had you cared as much as I your prudence would not have held you."

She hung her head a moment in silence; then, looking at him, almost ready for tears, continued: "A man has no right to speak in that way of a woman whose little favors he has taken, and make her regret that she has given a gift only that it may recoil upon her. 'Little,' did I say? Sir, do you know what that—first—kiss was to me? Had I possessed all the crowns of all the earth I would have given them to you as willingly. Now you know the value I placed on it, however worthless it was to you. Yet I was a cheerful giver of that great gift, was I not? And can you find it in your heart to make of it a shame to me—that of which I was so proud?"

She stood there with head inclined a little to one side, looking at him inquiringly as if awaiting an answer. He did not speak, but looked steadily at his book. I felt, however, that he was changing, and was sure her beauty, never more exquisite than in its present humility, would yet atone for even so great a fault as hers. Err, look beautiful, and receive remission! Such a woman as Mary carries her indulgence in her face.

I now began to realize for the first time the wondrous power of this girl, and ceased to marvel that she had always been able to turn even the King, the most violent, stubborn man on earth, to her own wishes. Her manner made her words eloquent, and already, with true feminine tactics, she had put Brandon in the wrong in everything because he was wrong in part.

Then she quickly went over what she had said to me. She told of her great dread lest the King should learn of the visit to Grouche's and its fatal consequences, knowing full well it would render Henry impervious to her influence and precipitate the French marriage. She told him of how she was going to the King the day after the arrest to ask his release, and of the meeting with Buckingham and his promise.

Still Brandon said nothing, and stood as if politely waiting for her to withdraw.

She remained silent a little time, waiting for him to speak, when tears, partly of vexation, I think, moistened her eyes.

"Tell me at least," she said, "that you know I speak the truth. I have always believed in you, and now ask for your faith. I would not lie to you in the faintest shading of a thought—not for heaven itself—not even for your love and forgiveness, as much as they are to me, and I want to know that you are sure of my truthfulness, if you doubt all else. You see I speak plainly of what your love is to me, for although, by remaining away, you made me fear I had been too lavish with my favors—that is every woman's fear—I knew in my heart you loved me; that you could not have done and said what you did otherwise. Now you see what faith I have in you, and you a man, whom a woman's instinct prompts to doubt. How does it compare with your faith in me, a woman, whom all the instincts of a manly nature should dispose to trust? It seems to be an unwritten law that a man may lie to a woman concerning the most important thing in life to her and be proud of it, but you see even now I have all faith in your love for me, else I surely should not be here. You see I trust even your unspoken word, when it might, without blame to you, be a spoken lie; yet you do not trust me, who have no world-given right to speak, falsely also such things, and when that which I now do is full of shame for me, and what I have done full of guilt, if inspired by aught but the purest truth from my heart of hearts. Your words mean so much—so much more, I think, than you realize—and are so cruel in turning to evil the highest, purest impulse a woman can feel—the glowing pride in self-surrender, and the sweet, delightful privilege of giving where she loves. How can you? How can you?"

How eloquent she was! It seemed to me this would have melted the frozen sea, but I think Brandon felt that now his only hope lay in the safeguard of his constantly upheld dignity.

When he spoke he ignored all she had said.

"You did well to employ my Lord of Buckingham. It will make matters more interesting when I tell you it was he who attacked you and was caught by the leg under his wounded horse; he was lame, I am told, for some time afterward. I had watched him following you from the gate at Bridewell, and at once recognized him when his mask fell off during the fight by the wall. You have done well at every step, I see."

"Oh, God, I think of it! Had I but known! Buckingham shall pay for this with his head; but how could I know? I was but a poor, distracted girl, sure to make some fatal error. I was in such agony—your wounds—believe me, I suffered more from them than you could. Every pain you felt was a pang for me—and then that awful marriage! I was being sold like a wretched slave to that old satyr, to be gloated over and feasted upon. No man can know the horror of that thought to a woman—to any woman, good or bad. To have one's beauty turn to curse her and make her desirable only—only as well fed cattle are prized. No matter how great the manifestation of such so-called love, it all the more repels a woman and adds to her loathing day by day. Then there was something else worse than all"—she was almost weeping now—"I might have been able to bear the thought even of that hideous marriage—others have lived through the like—but—but after—that—that day—when you—it seemed that your touch was a spark dropped into a heart full of tinder, which had been lying there awaiting it all these years. In that one moment the flame grew so intense I could not withstand it. My throat ached; I could scarcely breathe, and it seemed that my heart would burst." Here the tears gushed forth as she took a step toward him with outstretched arms, and said between her sobs: "I wanted you, you! for my husband—for my husband, and I could not bear the torturing thought of losing you or enduring any other man. I could not give you up after that—it was all too late, too late; it had gone too far. I was lost! lost!"

He sprang to where she stood leaning toward him and caught her to his breast.

She held him from her while she said: "Now you know—now you know that I would not have left you in that terrible place, had I known it. No, not if it had taken my life to buy your freedom."

"I do know; I do know. Be sure of that; I know it and shall know it always, whatever happens. Nothing can change me. I will never doubt you again. It is my turn to ask forgiveness now."

"No, no; just forgive me; that is all I ask," and her head was on his breast.

"Let us step out into the passage-way, Edwin," said Jane, and we did. There were times when Jane seemed to be inspired.

When we went back into the room Mary and Brandon were sitting in the window way on his great cloak. They rose and came to us holding each other's hands, and Mary asked, looking up to him:

"Shall we tell them?"

"As you like, my lady."

Mary was willing, and looked for Brandon to speak, so he said: "This lady whom I hold by the hand and myself have promised each other before the good God to be husband and wife, if fortune ever so favor us that it be possible."

"No, that is not it," interrupted Mary. "There is no 'if' in it; it shall be, whether it is possible or not. Nothing shall prevent." At this she kissed Jane and told her how she loved her, and gave me her hand, for her love was so great within her that it overflowed upon every one. She, however, always had a plentitude of love for Jane, and though she might scold her and apparently misuse her, Jane was as dear as a sister, and was always sure of her steadfast, tried and lasting affection.

After Mary had said there should be no "if," Brandon replied:

"Very well, Madame Destiny." Then turning to us: "What ought I to do for one who is willing to stoop from so high an estate to honor me and be my wife?"

"Love her and her alone, with your whole heart, as long as you live. That is all she wants, I am sure," volunteered Jane, sentimentally.

"Jane, you are a Madame Solomon," said Mary, with a tone of her old-time laugh. "Is the course you advise as you would wish to be done by?" And she glanced mischievously from Jane to me, as the laugh bubbled up from her heart, merry and soft as if it had not come from what was but now the home of grief and pain.

"I know nothing about how I should like to be done by," said Jane, with a pout, "but if you have such respect for my wisdom I will offer a little more; I think it is time we should be going."

"Now, Jane, you are growing foolish again; I will not go yet," and Mary made manifest her intention by sitting down. She could not bring herself to forego the pleasure of staying, dangerous as she knew it to be, and could not bear the pain of parting, even for a short time, now that she had Brandon once more. The time was soon coming—but I am too fast again.

After a time Brandon said: "I think Jane's wisdom remains with her, Mary. It is better that you do not stay, much as I wish to have you."

She was ready to obey him at once.

When she arose to go she took both his hands in hers and whispered, "'Mary,' I like the name on your lips," and, then glancing hurriedly over her shoulder to see if Jane and I were looking, lifted her face to him and ran after us.

We were a little in advance of the Princess, and as we walked along Jane said under her breath: "Now look out for trouble; it will come quickly, and I fear for Master Brandon more than any one. He has made a noble fight against her and against himself, and it is no wonder she loves him."

This made me feel a little jealous.

"Jane, you could not love him, could you?" I asked.

"No matter what I could do, Edwin; I do not, and that should satisfy you." Her voice and manner said more than her words. The hall was almost dark, and—I have always considered that occasion one of my lost opportunities; but they are not many.

The next evening Brandon and I, upon Lady Mary's invitation, went up to her apartments, but did not stay long, fearing we come may find us there and cause trouble. We would not have gone at all had not the whole court been absent in London, for discovery would have been a serious matter to one of us at least.

As I told you once before, Henry did not care how much Brandon might love his sister, but Buckingham had whispered suspicions of the state of Mary's heart, and his own observations, together with the intercepted note, had given these suspicions a stronger coloring, so that a very small matter might turn them into certainties.

The King had pardoned Brandon for the killing of the two men in Billingsgate, as he was forced to do under the circumstances, but there his kindness stopped. After a short time he deprived him of his place at court, and all that was left for him of royal favor was permission to remain with me and live at the palace until such time as he should sail for New Spain.

CHAPTER XIII.

A GIRL'S CONSENT.

The treaty had been agreed upon, and as to the international arrangement at least the marriage of Louis de Valois and Mary Tudor was a settled fact. All it needed was the consent of an 18-year-old girl—a small matter, of course, as marriageable women are but commodities in statecraft, and theoretically at least acquiesce in everything their liege lords ordain. Lady Mary's consent had been but theoretical, but it was looked upon by every one as amounting to an actual, vociferated, sonorous "yes"; that is to say, by every one but the Princess, who had no more notion of saying "yes" than she had of reciting the Sanscrit vocabulary from the pillory of Smithfield.

Wolsey, whose manner was smooth as an otter's coat, had been sent to fetch the needed "yes"; but he failed.

Jane told me about it.

Wolsey had gone privately to see the Princess, and had thrown out a sort of skirmish line by flattering her beauty, but had found her not in the best humor.

"Yes, yes, my lord of Lincoln, I know how beautiful I am; no one knows better. I know all about my hair, eyes, teeth, eyebrows and skin. I tell you I am sick of them. Don't talk to me about them; it won't help you to get my consent to marry that vile old creature. That is what you have come for, of course. I have been expecting you; why did not my brother come?"

"I think he was afraid; and to tell you the truth, I was afraid myself," answered Wolsey with a smile. This made Mary smile, too, in spite of herself, and went a long way toward putting her in a good humor. Wolsey continued: "His Majesty could not have given me a more disagreeable task. You doubtless think I am in favor of this marriage, but I am not."

This was as great a lie as ever fell whole out of a Bishop's mouth. "I have been obliged to fall in with the King's views on the matter, for he has had his mind set on it from the first mention by De Longueville."

"Was it that bead-eyed little mummy who suggested it?"

"Yes, and if you marry the King of France you can repay him with usury."

"'Tis an inducement, by my troth."

"I do not mind saying to you in confidence that I think it an outrage to force a girl like you to marry a man like Louis of France, but how are we to avoid it?"

By the "we" Wolsey put himself in alliance with Mary, and the move was certainly adroit.

"How are we to avoid it? Have no fear of that, my Lord; I will show you."

"Oh! but my dear Princess, permit me; you do not seem to know your brother. You cannot in any way avoid this marriage. I believe he will imprison you and put you on bread and water to force your consent. I am sure you had better do willingly that which you will eventually be compelled to do anyway; and besides, there is another thought that has come to me; shall I speak plainly before Lady Bolingbroke?"

"I have no secrets from her."

"Very well; it is this: Louis is old and very feeble; he cannot live long, and it may be that you can, by a ready consent now, exact a promise from your brother to allow you your own choice in the event of a second marriage. You might in that way purchase what you could not bring about in any other way."

"How do you know that I want to purchase aught in any way, Master Wolsey? I most certainly do not intend to do so by marrying France."

"I do not know that you wish to purchase anything, but a woman's heart is not always under her full control, and it sometimes goes out to one very far beneath her in station, but the equal of any man on earth in grandeur of soul and nobleness of nature. It might be that there is such a man whom any woman would be amply justified in purchasing at any sacrifice—doubly so if it were buying happiness for two."

His meaning was too plain even to pretend to misunderstand, and Mary's eyes flashed at him, as her face broke into a dimpling smile in spite of her.

Wolsey thought he had won, and to clinch the victory said, in his forceful manner: "Louis XII will not live a year; let me carry to the King your consent, and I guarantee you his promise as to a second marriage."

In an instant Mary's eyes shot fire, and her face was like the blackest storm cloud.

"Carry this to the King—that I will see him and the whole kingdom sunk in hell before I will marry Louis of France. That is my answer once and for all. Good even, Master Wolsey." And she swept out of the room with head up and dilating nostrils; the very picture of defiance.

St. George! She must have looked superb. She was one of the few persons whom anger and disdain and the other passions which we call ungentle seemed to illumine—they were so strong in her, and yet not violent. It seemed that every deep emotion but added to her beauty and brought it out, as the light within a church brings out the exquisite figuring on the windows.

After Wolsey had gone, Jane said to Mary: "Don't you think it would have been better had you sent a softer answer to your brother? I believe you could reach his heart even now if you were to make the effort. You have not tried in this matter as you did in the others."

"Perhaps you are right, Jane. I will go to Henry."

Mary waited until she knew the King was alone, and then went to him.

On entering the room, she said: "Brother, I sent a hasty message to you by the Bishop of Lincoln this morning, and have come to ask your forgiveness."

"Ah, little sister; I thought you would change your mind. Now you are a good girl."

"Oh! do not misunderstand me; I asked your forgiveness for the message. As to the marriage, I came to tell you it would kill me, and that I could not bear it. Oh! brother, you are not a woman—you cannot know." Henry flew into a passion, and with oaths and curses ordered her to leave him unless she was ready to give her consent. She had but two courses to take, so she left with her heart full of hatred for the most brutal wretch who ever sat upon a throne—and that is making an extreme case. As she was going she turned upon him like a fury, and exclaimed:

"Never, never! Do you hear? Never!"

Preparations went on for the marriage just as if Mary had given her solemn consent. The important work of providing the trousseau began at once, and the more important matter of securing the loan from the London merchants was pushed along rapidly. The good citizens might cling affectionately to their angels, double angels, crowns and pounds sterling, but the fear in which they held the King, and a little patting of the royal hand upon the plebeian head worked the charm, and out came the yellow gold, never to be seen again, God wot. Under the stimulus of the royal smile they were ready to shout themselves hoarse and to eat and drink themselves red in the face in celebration of the wedding day. In short, they were ready to be tickled nearly to death for the honor of paying to a wretched old lecher a wagon load of gold to accept, as a gracious gift, the most beautiful heart-broken girl in the world. That is, she would have been heart-broken had she not been inspired with courage. As it was she wasted none of her energy in lamentations, but saved it all to fight with. Heavens! how she did fight! If a valiant defense ever deserved victory, it was in her case. When the Queen went to her with silks and taffetas and fine cloths to consult about the trousseau, although the theme was one which would interest almost any woman she would have none of it, and when Catherine insisted upon her trying on a certain gown she called her a blackamoor, tore the garment to pieces and ordered her to leave the room.

Henry sent Wolsey to tell her that the 13th day of August had been fixed upon as the day of the marriage, De Longueville to act as the French King's proxy, and Wolsey was glad to come off with his life.

Matters were getting into a pretty tangle at the palace. Mary would not speak to the King, and poor Catherine was afraid to come within arm's length of her; Wolsey was glad to keep out of her way, and she flew at Buckingham with talons and beak upon first sight. As to the battle with Buckingham, it was short but decisive, and this was the way it came about: There had been a passage between the Duke and Brandon, in which the latter had tried to coax the former into a duel, the only way, of course, to settle the weighty matters between them. Buckingham, however, had had a taste of Brandon's nimble sword play, and, bearing in mind Judson's fate, did not care for any more. They had met by accident, and Brandon, full of smiles and as polite as a Frenchman, greeted him.

"Doubtless my Lord, having crossed swords twice with me, will do me the great honor to grant that privilege the third time, and will kindly tell me where my friend can wait upon a friend of his Grace."

"There is no need for us to meet over that little affair. You had the best of it, and if I am satisfied you should be, I was really in the wrong, but I did not know the Princess had invited you to her ball."

"Your Lordship is pleased to evade," returned Brandon. "It is not the ballroom matter that I have to complain of; as you have rightly said, if you are satisfied, I certainly should be; but it is that your Lordship, in the name of the King, instructed the keeper of Newgate prison to confine me in an underground cell and prohibited communication with any of my friends. You so arranged it that my trial should be secret, both as to the day thereof and the event, in order that it should not be known to those who might be interested in my release. You promised the Lady Mary that you would procure my liberty, and thereby prevented her going to the King for that purpose, and afterward told her it had all been done, as promised, and that I had escaped to New Spain. It is because of this, my Lord Buckingham, that I now denounce you as a liar, a coward and a perjured knight, and demand of you such satisfaction as one man can give to another for mortal injury. If you refuse, I will kill you as I would a cut-throat the next time I meet you."

"I care nothing for your rant, fellow, but out of consideration for the feelings which your fancied injuries have put into your heart, I tell you that I did what I could to liberate you, and received from the keeper a promise that you should be allowed to escape. After that a certain letter addressed to you was discovered and fell into the hands of the King—a matter in which I had no part. As to your confinement and non-communication with your friends, that was at his Majesty's command after he had seen the letter, as he will most certainly confirm to you. I say this for my own sake, not that I care what you may say or think."

This offer of confirmation by the King made it all sound like the truth, so much will even a little truth leaven a great lie; and part of Brandon's sails came down against the mast. The whole statement surprised him and, most of all, the intercepted letter. What letter could it have been? It was puzzling, and yet he dared not ask.

As the Duke was about to walk away Brandon stopped him. "One moment, your Grace; I am willing to admit what you have said, for I am not now prepared to contradict it; but there is yet another matter we have to settle. You attacked me on horseback and tried to murder me in order to abduct two ladies that night over in Billingsgate. That you cannot deny. I watched you follow the ladies from Bridewell to Grouche's, and saw your face when your mask fell off during the melee as plainly as I see it now. If other proof is wan