

"Sire," said Arnold, "I throw myself on your Majesty's compassion. Two years ago I returned from the Low Countries, after long absence in your Majesty's service. I came back to seek the lady whom I loved, and found the bells of Westringfold ringing, even as they are ringing now. Sire, the lady was newly wedded to my cousin, and I learned that my cousin, all ignorant of his danger, was that very night to be arrested."

A look of faint amusement came into the King's lazy eyes. "'Tis an ill wind, fair sir, that blows no man any good," he observed. "Fortune favours you, it is clear."

"Ah, Sire!" said Arnold. "If I dared to hope it! I had no cause to love my cousin for taking my sweetheart, yet if she truly loved him I had much cause to save his life."

"Your logic overpowers me, sir," said the King, satirically. "To what are you coming?"

"Your Majesty, I tried to save his life," said Arnold. "I got him away to sea on the Dutch craft which brought me hither, but the night fell stormy, and my cousin was washed overboard and drowned."

"You mean you pushed the rascal over," said the King.

"Sire, I mean no more than I have said," answered the young man, respectfully. "His wife was with us on the vessel."

"Oho!" laughed Charles, sitting upright. "His wife was there, was she! Fair sir, you are ingenious. And now, I take it, the lady is your wife, instead of your naughty cousin's?"

Arnold bowed. "Your Majesty is correct." But his blood boiled within him at the royal insinuation.

"This is a very droll tale," declared the King. "A vastly amusing tale, begad! And where is your heroine, sir?"

"Sire, the Countess of Vane awaits your Majesty