

"I must say I marvel at it myself," observed Elizabeth. "You near angered me just now; take care you do not so quite."

"I would not willingly, as your Grace knows."

"Then we will end this matter. You give me your assurance of loyalty to my person."

"With all my heart, madam," said Anthony eagerly.

"Then you must get to France within the week. The other too—Buxton—he loses his estate, but has his life. I am doing much for Minnie's sake."

"How can I thank your Grace?"

"And I will cause Sir Richard to give it out that you have taken the oath. Call him in."

There was a quick gasp from the priest; and then he cried with agony in his voice:

"I cannot, your Grace, I cannot."

"Cannot call Sir Richard! Why, you are mad, sir!"

"Cannot consent; I have taken no oath."

"I know you have not. I do not ask it."

Elizabeth's voice came short and harsh; her patience was vanishing, and Anthony knew it and looked at her. She had dropped her hand, and it was clenching and unclenching on her knee. Her stick slipped on the polished boards and fell; but she paid it no attention. She was looking straight at the priest; her high eyebrows were coming down; her mouth was beginning to mumble a little; he could see in the clear sunlight that fell on her sideways through the tall window a thousand little wrinkles, and all seemed alive; the lines at the corners of her eyes and mouth deepened as he watched.

"What a-Christ's name do you want, sir?"

It was like the first mutter of a storm on the horizon; but Anthony knew it must break. He did not answer.

"Tell me, sir; what is it now?"

Anthony drew a long breath and braced his will, but even as he spoke he knew he was pronouncing his own sentence.

"I cannot consent to leave the country and let it be given out that I had taken the oath, your Grace. It would be an apostasy from my faith."