

"Your Majesty is correctly informed," answered Marjorie, demurely.

"He says his cousin, your late husband, was accidentally drowned in attempting to escape from my officers. What do you say to that?"

"Sire, I believe my husband utterly," answered Marjorie. She gazed frankly in the King's heavy face, and then dropped her eyes before his long glance that was compounded of cynical good-humour and admiration.

Charles glanced at Arnold's great sword, which he still held by the hilt. "Madam and fair hostess," said he, "when eyes like yours inform me they believe, my doubts are conquered. My lord Earl, here is your sword." He handed back the ancient weapon, and Arnold, surprised and joyful, knew himself by that same token forgiven. "Be pleased, both of you," said the King, "to enter my carriage, and conduct me to your door. At dinner you shall tell us of your adventures." Rising, the King gave his hand to the young Countess and made her sit beside him in the coach. "My lord Earl," said he, "in very truth you have deserved the block. Your dead cousin's treason has cost your estates dear, and verily it would mightily convenience my treasury to send you to the Tower. In that case you would cease to be Vane. You take me?"

"I am in your Majesty's hands," answered Arnold, gravely.

Charles smiled slowly to himself. "And yet observe my quandary," said he. "It is impossible that the husband of this lady should ever cease to be vain. Therefore, since even kings cannot accomplish that which is impossible, it follows, does it not, that you are Vane, and must continue so?"

"I bow gratefully to your Majesty's gracious logic," answered Arnold, smiling.

Charles signed to his attendants, and the trumpets