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LORD DACRE OF GILSLAND; OR, The Rising in the North: An Historical Romance of the Days of Elizabeth.

By E. M. Stewart. CHAPTER IV.—CONTINUED.

"Rash girl!" said the stranger, "would you dare me? Have you forgotten so soon your peril of last night? If not safe in the well barred dwelling of your uncle, how can you now, alone and unprotected, calculate for one moment the crushing evils which the next may bring? Yet withal, Gertrude, I do applaud thy wit, which terms my knowledge of the truth conjecture."

"And thou, I conclude," answered Gertrude, "wert of the number of the poor-spirited knaves whose cowardly malice could dare no greater enterprise than that of tearing a hapless maiden from her home."

"Truly I was not one of their number, though had they secured so fair a treasure as thyself much had I demeaned me at their good fortune; but thy pretty blue-eyed cousin has few attractions for me, and fate most surely preserved thee as a prize for myself. I will make thee the lady of a wide domain—thy life shall pass in the fabled fairy-land, and thy father be secure; but a word now, a motion of resistance, and thy fair fame and thy father's life—his life, Gertrude—shall avenge my disappointment!"

As the stranger spoke these last words he grasped his victim more firmly, and prepared to force her to the remote extremity of the passage. Overcome by her terror, Gertrude felt a sensation of faintness; her eyes grew dim, and the features of the stranger swam before her yet more dubious than they had appeared in the uncertain light, conscious of her impending danger, yet wholly unable to resist it. She was borne through the passage and down a steep flight of stone stairs at its termination; a cold breeze of air blowing on her face, however, partly revived her, and the hollow sound of the stranger's footsteps convinced her that he was traversing a vault; the light was as doubtful as in the gallery above, and proceeded through a few iron bars placed high in the outer wall; through these bars, too, passed the current of air which had restored her falling senses. An arched doorway was before them, and to the right appeared a flight of stairs as steep as those which the stranger had just descended. He paused at the door, but it was secured by a massive bolt, and he was fain to support Gertrude on one arm while he withdrew the fastening. His hand, however, was arrested in the act by a person who had glided with the rapidity of thought out of the remote obscurity of the vault. Paralyzed by surprise and half choked by the strong grasp which the newcomer laid upon his throat, the stranger loosed his hold of Gertrude, and she looked up to recognize in the uncertain light the dark garments and wild blue eyes of the young man who had before interfered in her behalf, and whom Mancini had addressed by the name of Antonio. Gertrude addressed, for in that faint light she beheld a gleam in his hand, and it was pointed at the breast of the oppressor. The stranger gasped for utterance, and embarrassed by his heavy mantle fell vainly for the handle of his rapier.

"Resist not," said Antonio, "for your life! At once and alone pass through this door, or the next moment is your last."

in his mantle, and was withdrawing again into the more obscure part of the vault, where Gertrude dimly perceived a half-open door, leading apparently into another equally dismal apartment. He turned suddenly, however, as if then remembering her presence, and in a sharp, though husky tone, bade her "Begone!"

There was something in the voice and gestures of this strange young man which had firmly impressed Gertrude with a belief that he was insane, and dreading him on that account little less than the person from whose lawless designs he had so lately rescued her, she waited for no second command to begone, but fled with as much precipitation as the almost total darkness and her excessive terror would permit up the staircase immediately before her; nor did she perceive, in her haste and confusion, that it was not the same down which she had been before so lately borne.

After mounting some dozen steps she reached a narrow landing-place, from which the ascent diverged to the right. Down this latter flight of stairs poured a thin, narrow stream of light, proceeding from a partly open door at their summit. How joyfully did Gertrude hail the light of day, though it discovered only the green colour of the stone steps and the walls mildewed with age.

With renewed hope she sprung up the staircase, and, pushing open the door, obtained admittance into a spacious but apparently deserted chamber. The hangings were in several places dropping from the walls, and the dust of many years, together with the ardent rays of the sun that poured through the high arched windows, had robbed them of their bright colours.

Not a vestige of furniture was in this apartment; but as Gertrude gazed curiously through its dusky space she stumbled, and nearly fell over a silver crucifix, about half a foot long, which lay upon the ground. Instinctively and reverently did she stoop to pick it up. As she examined it she perceived a spring by which it would open at the back.

On pressing this spring Gertrude discovered a little hollow box within the figure, intended, no doubt, to contain some relic. Instead, however, of any such holy remembrance, it was now the depository of a tightly-folded strip of parchment, which on drawing from its place of concealment she found to be covered with ciphers.

On perceiving these ciphers Gertrude hastily replaced the scroll, and, returning the dangerous parchment to its concealment, laid the crucifix softly again upon the floor. She knew not what secrets were contained in those ciphers, and to have been found even with that reliquary in her hand might have compromised her life. She now looked round in search of escape from this lone room, and approached a door on the left hand in considerable apprehension lest she should find it locked. Such, however, was not the case; it admitted her into a little vestibule, lighted by an arched window, overlooking the gardens, and containing three doors. One of these doors stood partly open, and a low murmuring of voices from within met her ears.

Gertrude paused for a moment, irresolute whether to advance or to recede; then secure in the belief that her late audacious and powerful oppressor had certainly quitted the house, and feeling also the danger that attended her own protracted stay, and the necessity of at once discharging her mission to the Marquis Vitelli, she resolved to inquire for him of the inmates of that apartment. The door yielded readily to her touch and admitted her to a handsome room.

At a small bronze table stood the Secretary Mancini, waiting apparently the instructions of a gentleman in whom she beheld the great Italian commander. Something of the genius of its occupant might be traced in the furniture and decorations of that apartment. The walls were hung, like those of the ante-chamber, with crimson cloth, and depending from them were two braces of curiously wrought pistols, an Oriental sabre in a rich scabbard, and a Milan breastplate damasked with gold. On the table before him lay open a huge parchment tome of military tactics, and beside it one of the light rapiers commonly worn by the gentlemen of the time. The pressure of the helmet, perhaps, had somewhat thinned the dark locks on the forehead of the Italian, and there were a few slight furrows just traceable about his mouth; but all the fire and vivacity of youth still sparkled in his large black eye. The figure of Vitelli was noble and dignified, and, in preparation for the Queen's visit, he was richly attired in a suit of green velvet, puffed with white satin and cloth of gold; on his breast hung a brilliant star, and an agraffe of rubies confined the white plume in the velvet cap that lay beside him. In a huge Flemish chair, opposite the couch on which Vitelli sat, reclined a middle-aged person, clad in a doublet of dark blue, with a long wrapping mantle of the same color; a small ruff of Flanders lace encircled his throat and a massive gold chain crossed his breast. There was, however, in his appearance something of the primness so highly advocated in the austere doctrines of the Puritans; and the cynical expression of his somewhat spare features and the searching glance of his keen, deep-set, grey eye excited an unpleasant feeling in the beholder. Gertrude faltered for a moment when she saw this person, then stringing her nerves to the magnitude of the demand upon their firmness, she advanced with an inquiry for the Italian Captain.

sence, and a civet box of crystal and gold; then approaching as if to present these articles, she bent her knee before the Italian, and adroitly slipped the ring of Lord Dacre into his hand.—The Marquis interpreted her meaning look, and bending down as if to examine the scent-box, with an answering glance of intelligence received the letter, which she had wrapped in a piece of the brocade.

"Fairest of messengers!" he said, "I were more capricious than thine English climate to refuse so simple a request to so sweet a petitioner; doubt not I will visit the warehouses of thy father, and take thou a free pardon for thy present intrusion."

"Who indeed could doubt that the gallant Vitelli would pardon the intrusion of a beautiful damsel whatever be her mission?" said the grave-looking person before named, as Vitelli extended his hand to Gertrude and assisted her to rise.—There was little in these words, but it was the tone in which they were uttered and the look by which they were accompanied that gave them import. It seemed to say, "Something lurks here, most gallant Captain that does not meet the outward eye." The evident and continued confusion of Mancini's looks perhaps awakened in this person's mind a suspicion that Gertrude's visit to the Italian had some other than its assumed purpose; but a yet slighter circumstance would have sufficed to excite the doubts of the ever watchful and crafty Sir William Cecil. But Gertrude, as her father had boasted, was not ill calculated for the dangerous errands on which she was so frequently employed. Now, too, she was supported by the confidence of success; not, however, that rash, inconsiderate confidence which is written in the flushed cheek and the sparkling eye, but the calm security, the serenity of mind which attends the accomplishment of a high object—where the mind, too, has well weighed the chances both of failure and of success, and holds itself philosophically prepared even in good fortune for a reverse. Such was the confidence of Gertrude—so supported did she face with a firm eye and an unblenching brow the diving, withering gaze of the wildest of statesmen. She was at no loss, however, to read his thoughts, and she perceived that they were influenced by the confusion of Mancini; and she could have smiled, considering how little the Secretary knew of the real purport of her visit, to perceive how craft could overreach itself, and how Lord Burleigh, in his suspicions on the part of others—of those agents and spies whom he himself so abundantly employed—had implicated the unconscious Mancini in the meshes of a political plot. It was with some regret that she turned to leave the presence of the Italian; for though she had delivered the letter, she had been, from the nature of their interview, unable to procure from him any notice of the time at which he would see Lord Dacre. She had, however, obliquely made known to him the dwelling of her father, and could but hope that he would send some messenger there. She paused a moment on the threshold of the chamber to pray for Mancini's conduct to the hall below.

"For truly, noble Lord," she said, "it was my mistaking the labyrinth of your dwelling that brought me so abruptly to your presence."

Again were the keen eyes of the Minister bent upon her face; but in that open and candid brow there was nothing to excite even his suspicions. "I will not," said Vitelli, "complain, fair one, of any mischance which led thee to my presence; be it the office of Mancini to conduct you safely hence; yet taste, I pray you, of refreshment ere you depart."

"Thanks, gracious Lord," answered Gertrude, "but I may not longer delay my return to the abode of my father."

Led by the Secretary, she had passed through the vaulted gallery, when they were met by a page of Vitelli hastening to announce to his master the near approach of the Queen.

"With your leave, beautiful damsel," said Mancini, "I would fain urge your stay till after the arrival of her Highness; a crowd is collected near the outer gates, through which I surmise that you may scarcely force a passage." But Gertrude was too nervously eager to announce to Lord Dacre the nature of her interview with Vitelli to delay one unnecessary moment her return; firmly but courteously, therefore, she rejected the proposal. On passing the outer gate of Vitelli's abode, she found the truth of the Secretary's statement, and was inclined to wish that she had delayed her return home till after the arrival of the Queen.

shot with silver threads, and bordered with pearls. On either side of her rode the Lord Keeper, Incon, and Sir Francis Walsingham, the Secretary of State. A company of ladies sumptuously apparelled followed the Queen, and the procession closed with another body of the royal guard. The demeanor of Elizabeth was ever as gracious towards the common people as among her courtiers, she was haughty and severe, and though it was in anger that she now purposed visiting the Chepe, she yet received the shouts of the assembled multitude with many a graceful inclination and repeated exclamations of "I thank you, my good people." Her affability towards the humbler classes was, perhaps, a great secret of her long continued popularity; this gracious Princess was well aware that with the great mass of the people a seeming sympathy and kindness wins often as much as a real benefit, and that that familiarity on the part of their superiors, which they feel that they cannot demand as a right, is peculiarly grateful when freely extended to them as a favor.—Hence, in her progress through the country the meanness of her people had free access to the most imperious of Queens, she listened with an air of interest to their griefs, nor did she ever seem wearied by their importunity. Nor did this commendation sit ungracefully upon Elizabeth; though at no period of her life could she compete with the delicate beauty of her ill-fated rival, the Queen of Scots, she must still have been in her youth a very handsome woman. Nor had her personal attractions all disappeared at the time to which we refer; she could not be termed more than middle-aged, and her figure had lost none of its majesty, though it might be that she had already begun to heighten her once naturally fine complexion by the use of paint, which at a later period she employed to an immoderate excess. As it was, even with all her prejudice, Gertrude was compelled to acknowledge that there was much of grace and more of dignity in Elizabeth's mode of waving her symmetrical hand and bending her proud neck to the assembled multitude.

Meanwhile the thickening crowd had driven Gertrude forwards in spite of herself, and as the guards fled apart to afford the people a view of their sovereign she was pressed into the foremost rank, and found herself within a few paces of the Queen. At this moment Gertrude was sensible of a slight tumult among the people who had thrust her forwards, and turning her head to ascertain its cause, she beheld a person, well remembered by his dark garments and the wild glare of his blue eyes; an upraised pistol was in his right hand, and perceiving that he had levelled the weapon at the Queen, Gertrude yielding to that generous impulse which she would have felt equally had she seen the life of the meanest individual in peril, rushed forward with extended arms, and the bullet passing through her mantle, severely lacerated her wrist, and settled in the flank of the Lord Keeper's horse.

"Brave girl!" cried Elizabeth, who, though she had perceived her own danger, did not blanch for a moment. The scene immediately became one of inexpressible confusion, the multitude pressed simultaneously forward, more intent to discover whether the Queen were hurt than to apprehend the assassin; terrified and half frantic with pain, the Lord Keeper's horse became unmanageable, and it was with difficulty that he dismounted, while one of the guards held the bridle. A cry was raised to seize the murderer, but he had already vanished in the crowd, and so sudden had been his attempt against the Queen's life that no one except Gertrude had distinctly perceived him.—In the midst of the tumult Elizabeth remained calm, and while she sternly exclaimed, "It seems we must not allow our loving subjects such near approaches to our person," she added in a milder tone, "Look ye, my Lords, would ye trample her down, who has saved our life at the peril of her own, raise up the damsel, she faints beneath your feet."

Several of the noblemen in the Queen's train now crowded forwards, and Gertrude recovering from her faintness, looked up to behold the Queen, the, to her, dreaded and disliked Queen, gazing down upon her with looks of real gratitude and anxiety.

"Brave girl!" said Elizabeth again, flinging her own embroidered kerchief to Gertrude, and bidding her bind up her wrist, which was streaming with blood, then she continued, "We place not our thanks in words, and would show that there is trust even in princes; send me that kerchief, damsel, in the hour of thy need, we will deny no boon to the stain of thy loyal blood."

At this moment, a gentleman mounted on a grey charger, spurred amidst the Queen's attendants.

"Opportune do ye come, my Lord of Leicester," said Elizabeth, "look at you poor girl, the bullet that grazed her arm was designed for the bosom of the Queen; but God's truth, are we to murmur if chance a traitor lurks among our lieges, when the treason even discovers to us such right faithful hearts."

The words were meant for the ear of the people, but turning towards Walsingham, with her eyes flashing fire beneath her contracted brow; Elizabeth then exclaimed, in a tone half suffocated by passion—"The traitor, the black traitor, see on your allegiance that he be discovered; is it thus that our appointed person is exposed to deadly scathe, even in the full blaze of day."

"Thou art keen witted, Sir Francis," replied the Queen, "but evil alike is the yoke of Rome and of Geneva, with God's good pleasure, to neither one nor the other will we submit our neck. Set on, my lieges, we will pause according to our intent, at the dwelling of the Italian, and then to the Chepe, to look with our own eyes on the work of these goodly meddlers with heavenly matters and right wise and learned theologians."

"Not to-day, most august Sovereign," said Lord Leicester, holding the bridle of the Queen's palfrey, "your trusty guards have sought in vain for the traitor who has aimed at your most precious life; you must not venture to the Chepe to-day."

"Talk you, my Lord, of must not to Elizabeth; shall we leave the base and disloyal to cover over new plots of treason in their dens, and dream that the low fears of a churl can chill the heart of the daughter of a hundred kings? or shall we think that our fair city of London lacks a thousand spirits brave and prompt in our defence, as that which animates the form of yonder pale girl? Set on then, we will see the Cross of Cheping, and let those whose duty it was to secure the observance of our royal commands look well to themselves, we will fit them for heaven in due speed."

These last words of the Queen caught the ear of Gertrude, who, yet faint with pain and loss of blood, learned on the arm of Lord Merdon, a young nobleman of Elizabeth's train. The brave and kind-hearted Edward Wood immediately recurred to her recollection, and springing from her support, she clung to the trappings of the Queen's palfrey.

"Al, gracious Sovereign!" she exclaimed, "if your beneficence rate at any value the slight service it has been the lot of the meanest daughter of your land to render you this day, be pleased then to extend your royal mercy to the Warden of the City Watch. His duty it was, indeed, to guard the Cross of Eleanor, but friendship and charity drew him, last night into neglect. My cousin, a poor helpless maiden, was dragged by violence from her home, and in pity to the anguish of her distracted relatives did the brave Warden forget his duty and himself. Mercy, then, most gracious Sovereign, do not condemn him for a kindly deed."

"It seemeth meet indeed, my Lords, that we visited the city," said Elizabeth. "It were well we looked to its quiet ourselves, since so many during deeds have been perpetrated there in one short night, the peace and safety of our poor subjects violated, and our royal commands set at naught." Then turning to Gertrude the Queen continued, "Be of good cheer, my pretty damsel, thy friend, the Warden, shall meet with all such grace as the severe arm of justice may lawfully extend; but it behoveth thee to remember that private interests are as a feather in the scale of the public good, and towards that public good most woefully has thy friend failed in his duty.—Yet, cheer thee, we will ourselves keep a kind thought of this Warden for thy sake."

Gertrude, however, was in no condition to profit by this gracious assurance on the part of the Queen; her wrist was intolerably painful; Elizabeth's voice rung in her ears, strangely mingling with the trumpeting and the clamour of the populace. The Earl of Leicester, who perceived that she was near fainting, now advanced and proffered his hand to raise her from her kneeling posture. His approach seemed for the moment to restore the consciousness of the maiden, for she started suddenly and unassisted to her feet, and gazed as if spell bound upon his features; then shrinking from his touch as from an asp's tongue, she sunk senseless to the ground.

CHAPTER V. Now or never the world Nature seems dead, and half-dreams abuse The curtain sleep; now witchcraft celebrates Pale Hecate's offerings; and withered murder, Alarmed by his sentinel, the wolf, Whose howl's his watch, thus with his stealthy pace, With Tarquin's ravishing strides, towards his design, Moves like a ghost.

MACBETH. The night succeeding that on which the unfortunate Lucy Fenton had been torn from her home was as tranquil and beautiful as the preceding one had been stormy. Lord Dacre and the worthy citizen John Harding, had passed the day in an anxious watching for Gertrude's return, but hour after hour passed away and she came not. The distress of the good old man was even exceeded by that of his noble guest, who reproached himself as the cause of whatever ill might happen to the damsel. The busy little tailor, Master Williams, had, according to his determination expressed to Gertrude, called at her father's house in the morning to beg of Edward Wood to conceal himself until the Queen's pleasure should be known concerning the offenders in the Chepe. Feeling, however, that he had really neglected his duty, no persuasions, either of Harding or of the good-natured tailor, could induce the young man to consult his safety by flight—such a line of conduct would, he said, imply on his part an absolute connivance at the offence, and at the same time expose his inferiors in office to pay the penalty of a fault which was chiefly his own. In spite, therefore, of all entreaties to the contrary, Edward Wood assumed his post among the city functionaries awaiting the arrival of the Queen. Absorbed in their anxiety for Gertrude, and their care for the sick Willoughton, the inmates of Harding's house heard no more of Edward Wood till towards evening, when the pretty and malicious Bertha Allen looked in to partake again of nurse Mabel's dainties, and to announce, which she did with an evident relish of ill-nature, "That the Warden was imprisoned during the pleasure of the Queen's grace."

(TO BE CONTINUED IN OUR NEXT.) "How is it," said a gentleman to Sheridan, "that your name has not an O attached to it? Your family is Irish, and no doubt illustrious." "No family had a better right to the O than our family," said Sheridan, "for we owe everybody." "If you didn't see the comet this time it don't matter; it will be around again in about 270 years."