Crabb

Francis Bacon

1597

By Riley Hansard Crabb

VP

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FRANCIS BACON – 1597

A romantic look at three harried days in 1597, July 26, 27 and 28, including the closing of London Playhouses for presenting treasonous material. Actor Will Shakstpur ducked out across the English Channel. Ben Jonson was thrown in the Clink and England's greatest dramatist, Francis Bacon, fled for his life from the avenging hands of the Queen's minions. Ah, but there was the beauteous Lady Hatton to save him from his own folly and to give him loving consolation.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

* * *

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INTRODUCTION

This little historical romance centers around one of the little-known but important crises in the life of Sir Francis Bacon. It has been held for over a hundred years now, by such Americans as Delia Bacon, Dr. Orville Owen, Elizabeth Wells Gallup, Ignatius Donnelly and Edwin Reed, that Bacon was the legitimate son of Queen Elizabeth and the Earl of Leicester. Not only that, the lawyer-philosopher-poet also wrote the Shakespeare Plays. The material for this novelette is based on these two facts.

Bacon's goal was to restore man to his proper place, master of himself and master of Nature. He states this in the writings published under his own name, especially "Instauratio Magna", the Great Restoration -- to free knowledge from the stifling dogma of the Roman Catholic Church. In his great works on Philosophy Sir Francis divides knowledge into six parts. The analysis of Spedding, Reed and others indicates that four parts of it were finished before his supposed death in 1626.

The first was a compilation of the basic knowledge available to Western Europe in the 16th Century, Bacon's "Advancement of Learning". The second was a listing of the rules by which a person should be guided in his search for Truth, "Novum Organum". The third was simply a collection of the facts of Nature. This was not completed but "Sylva Sylvarum" was part of it: History of Winds, History of the Dense and Rare, etc.

The fourth part of Francis Bacon's Restoration of Knowledge was a dramatic presentation of human strengths and weaknesses, and the ethics and morals which would support or correct them. Broad hints as to this intended use of the Plays are contained in "Novum Organum" where he writes: "For I am forming a history and Tabulae Inveniendi for anger, fear, shame and the like, for matters political. . . I mean actual types and models, by which the entire process of the mind and the whole fabric and order of invention from the beginning to the end of certain subjects, and those various and remarkable, should be set, as it were, before the eyes. . . "

The famous Bacon historian of the 19th Century, Spedding, says, "Of the fourth part (of Bacon's philosophy) not even any fragment has come down to us." But Reed points out that the Comedies, Histories and Tragedies of Shakes-peare admirably fill the bill."

"King Lear" portrays ingratitude, "Othello" jealousy, "Timon of Athens" prodigality, "Measure for Measure" hypocrisy, "Richard II" flattery, and so on. Bacon wasn't interested in painting individual portraits of types, as in a book on psychology, but dramatizing them in their natural setting! For he wrote in "Advancement of Learning" his desire to show "the various combinations and arrangements of which all characters whatever are made up, how many. . . how connected and

subordinate, one to another; so we may have a scientific and accurate dissection of minds and characters, and the secret dispositions of particular men revealed; and that for the knowledge thereof better rules may be framed for the treatment of the mind."

The German literary historian, George Gervinus, hit close to our secret when he agreed with Sir Francis on "the want of a science of human nature" and that "historians and poets are the ones to supply it; and he (Bacon) might well have searched for it, before all, in the writings of his neighbor, Shakespeare, for no other poetry has taught us, as his has done, that the taming of the passions is the aim of human civilization."

Now we are not going so far as to say this was Francis Bacon's high purpose at the time of this story, July 1597. He was only an impecunious young lawyer then, with the expensive tastes of a young nobleman and the purse of a poor commoner! He wrote the Plays primarily to make money, as well as give release to the irrepressible creative drive within him. In modern parlance he was an angry young man also, thoroughly disgusted with the corruption of the times; so the Plays expressed his liberal political leanings and thereby hangs our tale.

It wasn't until ten or fifteen years later, when the fickle public taste had gone on to other amusements and styles, that the great dramatist-turned-statesman decided to use the old Plays as the fourth part of his ambitious program, the Restoration of Learning. As a result of this he extensively rewrote and added new scenes for the Great Folio edition of the Plays in 1623, years after Shagsburre's death at Stratford in 1616. 1000 new lines were added to "The Taming of the Shrew". Bacon doubled the length of the text of the old edition of "Henry V", which displays heroism. Two new scenes were added. 1000 new lines were added to "King John". This 1623 rewrite was also for the sake of Bacon's Word Cypher in the Plays -- which code was broken in the 1880s by Dr. Owen. The Word Cypher is the only source for some of Bacon's personal history from which our material is drawn.

But enough of literary analysis and criticism. Let's flesh out these dry intellectual bones with the warmth of human passions of a few of our ancestors of 370 years ago!

Riley Hansard Crabb
Vista, California
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THE HILYARD MINIATURES OF QUEEN ELIZABETH AND FRANCIS BACON

QUEEN ELIZABETH
Hilyard Miniature.

FRANCIS BACON
AT EIGHTEEN
Hilyard Miniature

FRANCIS BACON AND HIS FATHER, THE EARL OF LEICESTER

From *The Tragedy of Francis Bacon*, Harold Bayley

A comparison of the portraits of these two men in adult life show unmistakably marked resemblances. The resemblance between Francis Bacon, Queen Elizabeth and Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, is too strong to be ignored. On the other hand, if the portrait of Francis Bacon be compared with those of Sir Nicholas and Lady Bacon, it will be seen that he is unlike them in every particular . . . in form, build and facial characteristics. Everything indicates that he was regarded by them as a "ward" and not as a son.

FRANCIS BACON, 1597

CHAPTER ONE

"The Dark Night Hath So Discovered."

A night to remember, that it was, the Queen's ball in the palace at Greenwich. The time? July 26, 1597. England was in an undeclared war with Spain and the Church. The people were in an undeclared but open conflict with Elizabeth's government. And at the palace? The war between the sexes. Ah, but that was the undeclared war which outlasted all the others and gave endless delight, especially in this court dominated by a dissolute old monarch, now in the 39th year of her reign. In later years, a discerning historian of that same happy kingdom would say that absolute power corrupts absolutely. After a lifetime of undisputed rule of England, "good" Queen Bess was the perfect example of the axiom.

But why philosophize when warm arms and warmer, softer lips await in the darkness of an alcove. Better yet, let's find a balcony where summer breezes finger the curls and the curves of a court beauty and fan the spark of love into a flame of passion.

Within, the musicians bow their fiddles and the strains of the Queen's favorite melody guide the measured steps of the dancers. There in the brilliant glare of a thousand candles, and under the alert gaze of a thousand eyes, love is at arm's length and expressed with the gleam of an eye or a slight squeeze of the fingers as the partners turn, walk or glide.

Ah, but here in the sheltering gloom it's body to body. One can thrill to the delicious length of limb. There's precious little beneath the Elizabethan gown in summer. The two protagonists in the world's oldest battle relaxed their hold on each other. They were a little startled at the desire which flamed upward from their loins; besides, they were not alone on the balcony. Now that their eyes were grown accustomed to the darkness, they saw and heard others savoring the delights of the flesh.

Was that white shaft in the dark the length of a lady's skirt? Or was it her leg, naked to the thigh? Francis Bacon didn't wait to make sure but pivoted his lady love firmly around and moved her away and over to the balcony railing and the soft starlight. There was a three-quarter moon to add more light and tip the trees in the garden

with pale silver. Half in jest, half to turn his mind from the raging blood within him, he breathed a few lines from one of his old plays.

"Ah, the moon, the envious moon,
Who is already sick and pale with grief,
That thou her maid art far more fair than she. . "

Lady Elizabeth Hatton, more concerned with the wondrous storm aroused within her, was silent. Her lover tried again.

"She speaks, yet she says nothing: what of that?
Her eye discourses, I will answer it. --
I am too bold, 'tis not to me she speaks:
Two of the fairest stars in all the heaven,
Having some business to entreat her eyes
To twinkle in their spheres till they return. . "

The gorgeous creature within his arm, almost as tall as he, stirred and pushed slightly away with a laugh. She, too, welcomed this change of pace and picked him up with other of Juliet's immortal lines.

"Oh, gentle Francis,
If thou dost love, pronounce it faithfully;
Or if thou thinkest I am too quickly won,
I'll frown, and be perverse, and say thee nay.
So thou wilt woo; but else, not for the world.
In truth, fair Francis, I am too fond;
And therefore thou mayst think my 'haviour light:
But trust me, gentleman, I'll prove more true
Than those that have more cunning to be strange.
I should have been more strange, I must confess,
But that thou over-heardst, ere I was 'ware,
My true love's passion: therefore, pardon me;
And not impute this yielding to light love,
Which the dark night hath so discovered."

Francis thrilled within him as never before to hear those immortal lines so wondrous spoke, so real from the court beauty close locked to his side. The lawyer was o'erwhelmed by the poet.

"Lady, by yonder blessed moon I swear,
That tips with silver all these fruit-tree tops -- "

"Oh, swear not by the moon, the inconstant moon," she protested, "that monthly changes in her encircled orb. Lest that thy love prove likewise variable."

"What shall I swear by, Lillibet?" asked Francis in mock despair. This was rich. This was wonderful. The incomparable Lady Hatton returning his lines in a setting better than any play. This was life! Her memory of Juliet's lines continued.

"Do not swear at all;
Or if thou wilt, swear by thy gracious self,

Which is the god of my idolatry,
And I'll believe thee."

"If my heart's dear love, -- " he began in reply but she pushed gently and firmly away from him. The gentleman o'ercame the lover and he yielded to a separation of a few inches. Lady Hatton continued the play.

"Well, do not swear; although I joy in thee,
I have no joy of this contract tonight;
It is too rash, too unadvised, too sudden;
Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be
Ere one can say, it lightens. Sweet, good night!
This bud of love, by summer's ripening breath,
May prove a beauteous flower when next we meet.
Good night! Good night! as sweet repose and rest
Come to thy heart as that within my breast!"

They were side by side, looking out over the moon-misted beauty of the night. Francis would have turned her to him to taste again the heady wine of her soft lips, to press again into that milk-full breast. The next lines were so appropriate!

"Oh, wilt thou leave me so unsatisfied?" he demanded as he tried to swing her around to face him, but she would not and thrust away.

"What satisfaction canst thou have tonight?" Lillibet gathered her skirts and headed for the light, the music and the noisy ball within. Francis, exceeding bold, followed quick to catch her.

"The exchange of thy love's faithful vow for mine."

At the door he caught her hand and tried in vain to draw her back into the pregnant darkness.

"I gave thee mine before thou didst request it. Is that not enough?" She flashed a dazzling smile at him, twisted quickly from his grasp, but in doing so pulled her hand across the jewelled buckle at his waist. The scratch brought blood and a sharp "ouch" from her.

Francis was all contrite and would have kissed the blood away from the little wound but she covered it quickly with a bit of lace-edged linen from her bosom.

"Allow me, I pray, Lillibet," Francis leaned over her hand the better to see the extent of the injury -- they were still in the shadow of the doorway -- and also to avoid the hurt anger that flamed up suddenly in her eyes. He looked up.

"It is nothing, really."

Elizabeth twisted away again, leaving her linen in his hand, and slipped among the press of courtiers in the hall with Francis in hot pursuit.

Lady Hatton threaded her way swiftly along the edge of the ballroom floor, in and out amongst dancers and spectators until she reached the throne. Faced with the choice of going around behind it or crossing in front, she chose the latter and assayed to pass the Queen with a low curtsy. Bess took in pursued and pursuer at a glance.

"Ho," she stopped Lady Hatton with an imperious but friendly gesture, "pray tell, what new dance is this?"

Francis dropped to his knees before his mother; she knew his presence only too well. But this baggage, this vision of loveliness caught her lecherous eye, the figure ripe with new motherhood, the full breasts bursting from their confining bodice, the rich, dark, wavy hair, deep brown eyes against a creamy white skin. Lady Hatton, widowed at 19 and with a year-old daughter, was indeed a joy to behold. Add to that extensive properties in England and Wales, hers in her own right, and this Elizabeth was one of the prize catches of London in 1597!

The scratch on the back of her hand was still oozing a drop of blood. The Queen saw it. She looked quickly at Francis and back at Lillibet, who blushed rosy red and lowered her head and eyes slightly, to reveal unbelievably long lashes. Her Majesty looked sternly at Francis again.

"What lover's quarrel is this that ends in bloodshed?" She wasn't really angry but nevertheless, "Away with you, Mr. Bacon. I'll tend to her myself. Come forward, lass."

Thus abruptly dismissed, Francis rose to his feet and withdrew disconsolate into the press. Lady Hatton's blood-spotted linen was still tightly clutched in his hand.

Ever thrilled at the sight and smell of blood, good Queen Bess reached quickly for a lace hanky of her own and, ignoring Lillibet's protests, pressed tightly against the little wound. Doubly stimulated, the old jade perked up and took a livelier interest in the evening's festivities and especially in the beauteous girl before her.

Lady Hatton had style and dash, and the ever-ready wit so highly prized by the Queen and her court. Beyond that the girl was cultured, well educated and had traveled widely, making a brilliant conversational foil for the sophisticated old monarch. Lillibet was quite different from the virginal young ladies-in-waiting who came so innocently to Queen Elizabeth's privy chamber. The thrill of the chase was upon her. The old jade was a past-mistress at lechery and fifty years' experience in the art of love was turned to the fascinating task of conquering the delightful prize before her.

The fact that her son Francis was paying court to the girl bothered old Bess not a whit; rather did it add an extra fillip to the chase. If she could bed the girl before her son? What rare sport indeed! This perverse triumph was just the kind of play which appealed the most to the eccentric queen. Jaded years before with a succession of the most handsome, virile males her kingdom afforded, her syphilitic nymphomania

had driven her to seek the more exquisite, lesbian delights of her own sex. The reputations of the girls who graduated from her school of venery had long before spread to the Continent. Where possible or necessary. the old bitch married them off to noblemen who would best maintain her despotism.

For his part, Francis Bacon knew only too well what lay ahead of Lady Hatton that evening; or what he didn't know for sure he suspected; and his heart was troubled. This was just one more rebuff added to the long string of humiliations and frustrations stretching back to his earliest childhood. He, who should have been Francis First, King of England -- or at least Prince of Wales at thirty-six -- was still only Francis Bacon, rising young barrister without title or lands! Must he suffer loss of his lady love to his mother? As well as his honor?

Concerned with his inner turmoil he made his way unheeding through the merriment to one of the game rooms where it was a little more quiet. He helped himself to a glass of wine at the sideboard, skirted the tables of Primero players absorbed in their cards, and slumped into a deep chair.

He sipped his wine. It was delicious to the taste but when the alcohol burned down his throat it almost gagged him. Any vague idea he had of dulling his pain with the grape left him. With Lillibet's blood-stained kerchief still in his left hand he fell to contemplating the flicking firelight through the golden amber of the liquid, sparkling brilliantly in the delicate Viennese goblet. His fancy returned to the ballroom he had just left, to the two Elizabeths, one nineteen, the other sixty-four. He watched the weaving of the hypnotic spell by which the old jade glamorized the girl much as a snake binds the fascinated gaze of a bird. Already, they had retired to that charming, intimate little room which had been the scene of many a previous conquest in the battle of sex.

"Dost thou sing?" the Queen had asked. Lillibet replied in the affirmative. Without the help of her ladies, the Queen rose. The surrounding sycophants thereupon knelt or curtsied in ever-widening waves, like grain falling before the scythe. Urging them to be on with their merriment, she tucked her steel crutch under one arm, took the hand of Lillibet in the other, and stumped off. There were knowing looks and many a sly jest among the courtiers as the orchestra struck up the dance again.

One among them seemed especially elated. It was a mis-shapen wretch of a man, the Queen's secretary of state, Robert Cecil. He vigorously nodded his approval as Elizabeth Hatton marched off. She was his neice. He would make sure that this blossoming intimacy would beof great value to him and to the Cecil clan!

All that was most expensive and best in Continental art, drapery and furnishings, graced the exquisite chamber to which Queen Bess led her subject -- or should we say object? Lillibet gasped in surprise and delight. She had heard of this little jewel box in the palace, but to see it now in muted candlelight! A dozen mirrors, each in a dis-

tinctly different frame, reflected back the hand-rubbed paneling, the tapestries, the fantastically beautiful and delicate candelabra. Above all there was the beauty of the queen's hand-picked ladies-in-waiting. Multiplied a hundred times in the reflecting glass it was enough to turn the head of any man or woman.

They walked over deep-pile rugs to a virginal, the piano of Elizabethan times. Bess seated her lovely companion beside the instrument and placed herself before it. An accomplished musician, she twanged the strings with a preliminary scale, struck a chord, and then launched into one of the rhythmic sea chantys she had learned so many years before from one of her early lovers, Admiral Howard. It was the oft-told tale of the sailor, lost at sea and yearning to return to his love. Years of dissipation had given Bess the voice for it. Her upper register had gone long ago. She now had a sort of a brandy tenor. It rasped harsh on the ears when berating an unfortunate minister or diplomat but in these artful surroundings it gave promise of all the bedroom delights the old bitch had enjoyed since her father, Henry VIII, had kicked her out of his palace at the tender age of eleven for seducing a Moorish page boy!

"Hast lost thy voice?" rasped the Queen.

Her attendants were fluttering around her and chattering like magpies. They picked up the first chorus with their leader. It went on for fifteen verses, some witty, some vulgar, some outright pornographic, causing the girls to shriek with laughter. Lillibet couldn't help but be drawn into the fun and finally was singing the choruses as lustily as the rest.

"Now you?" Bess smiled sweetly and encouragingly.

"Canst thou play Green Sleeves, your Highness?" Lillibet asked hesitantly.

Suiting the action to the word Bess swung into the popular love song and Lillibet picked up the line of melody without missing a beat. Her clear soprano was vibrant in this elegant sin-spot. The pure voice gave rich meaning to the mournful tune and stilled her listeners. At the finish there wasn't a dry eye in the romm and the Queen and her ladies burst into enthusiastic applause.

"A toast!" Queen Bess exclaimed and servants came running.

In neat claret Lady Hatton's vocal charms were honored. The Queen insisted on a second round before the glasses were downed. Heady with the wine and the adulation, Lillibet picked up a lute and accompanied herself in a little love song of her own composition. Not to be outdone, the Queen adlibbed an accompaniment and when Lillibet was through went on into a gypsy tune she had learned from an ambassador from Eastern Europe. The Queen wasn't sure who it was or how long ago, Poland perhaps.

"This is new to me," said Lillibet, who prided herself on her

musical training, gained in some of the best studios in the City. Such nostalgic yearning there was in the slow, mournful passages; yet there was an underlying beat that pushed deeply into one, going beyond sorrow and suffering into the great mother earth, bursting forth from the bonds of winter.

Under the Queen's skillful fingers the virginal throbbed with accelerated tempo. Containing themselves no longer, the ladies-in-waiting began to move and stomp to the rhythm. Lillibet looked on in astonishment. She felt the wild passion in this strange eastern music, felt it down to her very toes and every place between, but to give way to it in this abandoned fashion, well! Yet, in spite of herself she began to sway to the beat. Her attention was riveted on the others as they swirled around the room.

Finally, it ended. This time the servants anticipated the need for more wine and glasses were hastily filled as the court beauties sprawled on the handiest chair to catch their breath and exclaim over the excitement of the dance.

Scarcely had they caught their breath when the Queen, like a devilish dancing master, was after them again. This time it was an English folk dance, a reel. And this time, Lillibet danced, too. Round and round and round they went, farthingales flying, locks flying, shoes kicked off, faces and arms and bosoms glistening from the heat and the excitement.

As though that were not enough, the music and the beat switched to an Irish jig even livelier, and good Queen Bess drove them on until, finally, all collapsed in a heap on the floor.

There really wasn't enough air in the jewell box, even though the leaded panes were open to the summer night. Late now, it was cool too. As though on cue the ladies begged to be allowed to go out into the gallery for air. The Queen derisively consented. She was just beginning to get warmed up! It was time for another round of drinks. A nod to the help and the glasses were full again. Picking hers up with a gesture that would have better suited a stein of beer, Bess downed her claret in one gulp and asked for another. Lillibet fingered her delicate Venetian goblet with more lady-like grace and lingered over the fragrant liquid, savoring every swallow as it passed her heated throat.

"The wine is good," she said appreciatively. "The Earl of Essex doth well to keep your Majesty's table supplied with such vintage."

"And well he should, the knave," croaked Bess. Any compliment to her second son was a compliment to her, though Lady Hatton was then ignorant of the maternal relationship, still believing in the Queen's virginity!

Lillibet placed her empty glass with a slightly unsteady hand on the end of the virginal. When the ready servant filled it again she didn't pick it up. She lifted the lute and struck the chords of an Irish ditty in a minor key. She sang with such feeling the mournful

tune, maudlin in its sentiment, it brought tears to the old Queen's eyes. She turned and gestured to the butler. In a moment the glittering splendor of the place began to be bathed in twilight as the candles were snuffed out, one by one. The oft-repeated ceremony of the hunt was an old, old story to the privy chamber staff. Finally, the two were lighted only by a chastely simple candelabra on the virginal. Strangely, none of the ladies-in-waiting had returned to make a trio of this duet. All this nibbled at the fringes of Lady Hatton's alcohol dulled consciousness. But would she, could she escape the web of lechery old Bess was weaving around her, even if she knew the seductive road down which she was headed?

Being the director of the production, Bess swung the performance from Irish love songs to roistering alehouse ballads, bawdy as they could be. Lillibet was beyond shocking now and, tongue over-thickened with wine, stumbled along after Bess as she roared the lines of Eleanor of Rummin:

"I am not cast away,
That can my husband say.
When we kiss and play,
In lust and liking,
He calls me his whiting,
His mulling and his mitten,
His nobes and his conny,
His sweeting and his honey,
With bass my pretty bonny,
Thou are worth good and money;
This make bare my fanny,
Till he be dreamy and dronny,
For, after all our sport,
Then will he rout and snort;
Then sweetly together we lie
As two pigs in a sty."

"Drink up, lass, drink up!" exclaimed the old jade. She hoisted her glass and openly toasted Lesbos. When the ever-ready butler started forward from the shadows Bess waved him back and picked up the decanter herself.

"We would be alone!"

She filled her own glass and brought Lillibet's up to the brim again. The girl dutifully reached numbed, trembling fingers toward it but the impatient queen picked it up and handed it to her. She raised it to her lips, tilted it, and spilled most of it down her chin and bosom. She looked wonderingly down at the red staining her alabaster breasts and the pale blue silk of her bodice. She giggled. This was the funniest thing in the world. The queen roared.

"Here, I'll help ye, sweetheart." The opportunity was not to be missed. Taking her own kerchief the Queen reached over and slowly stroked the drops away. Boldly she slipped her skinny fingers under the girl's breast, lifted it up and wiped up the wine that had run

beneath. The unaccustomed touch of the claw-like hand caused Lillibet some shock at first and she feebly raised her own in protest -- but after all, wasn't this her Queen? By the time Bess had swabbed and massaged the second one and placed it back in its nesting place, Lady Hatton felt her first thrill of Lesbian love. It seemed wickedly delightful; the young widow slumped further down in her chair and laughed. It was high-pitched and shrill. The old bitch cackled along with her, placing a bold and experimental hand on the girl's knee.

There was no gesture of protest this time. The laughter gave way to a giggle as a wave of desire swept up the girl's body. Engulfed in the aura of passion generated by the Queen, her normal civilized controls subverted by the wine, Lillibet gave the Queen a burning glance that would have melted a stone.

Her hand still on the girl's knee, Bess pulled her even lower down in the chair next to the virginal, dangerously low. Her head rested on the back. The mass of black curls spread enticingly over the soft lustre of the polished wood and tapestry. Her buttocks teetered on the edge of the seat. The Queen, watchful of her own sore leg, eased herself off the virginal stool down on to the soft rug before her, leaning heavily on the girl's knees and thrusting the thighs apart into a most unlady-like posture indeed. One knee collapsed under the pressure, shooting forward a delicately shaped foot, high-arched in a filigreed silk stocking. The trim ankle promised untold delights above. With reverent hand Bess slowly lifted the silken paniers, savoring every moment of revelation. Brilliant red garters, just below the knee, caught her eye. She slipped one down the leg and laid it aside, a trophy of the chase. Then that stocking came off, a limp symbol of the coming conquest, to be quickly tossed aside as the Queen bent to cover the pink-white toes with passionate kisses.

Lillibet squirmed at this and made a slight effort to withdraw and sit up but Bess held her. She grasped the bare knee and kissed that, pushing the skirt before her and going on. The girl gasped and placed her hands on Bess's head, but whether to push her questing lips away or urge her on was hard to say. Grasping the tender fingers in her own, Bess kissed them, too. Then she turned the girl's hand over and planted a long, long kiss in the palm. Lillibet writhed at the contact, arching her back at the resistless demands of the Queen's passion. She slid forward another inch and would gone into a heap on the floor if Bess hadn't held her by leaning against her. She had to grasp the girl's white thighs in doing so and with the doors of the temple of Venus so close before her she encircled the marble shafts with her arms, lifted the final veil and pressed her burning lips home.

CHAPTER TWO

Elizabeth Breaks A Finger

Elsewhere on that same floor of Greenwich Palace, Francis Bason was still ensconced in that deep and easy chair in the game room. He had been ignored by the card players. Nor was he interested in joining a group to display that brilliant conversation for which he was so justly famous. This new hurt, this new slight imposed on him by his mother was too deep to be glossed over by the social graces. Rather did he turn inward to brood over his fate, to wonder at this latest twist of fortune.

He'd scarcely moved since he flopped down before. He was waiting, for what? Lady Hatton's blood-stained kerchief was still in his hand. He had turned it over and over, savoring the heady blend of delicate perfume and vibrant life-force which came from it. He picked up the wine glass again. He had drunk enough that its subtle poison loosened the bonds of consciousness. To look into the depths of the amber liquid was to look as into a glass darkly. Gleams from the fire flickered through it to heighten his perceptions. The translucent gold of the wine strangely lightened. It became a cloud of white mist. Francis watched in bemused silence, impersonal, his body numbed with wine and long sitting.

The cloud of mist rolled away to reveal the living image of a shadowed room. Without knowing how or why he knew, it was the jewell box, misty but real. Lady Hatton and the Queen were there, alone together. Their unseemly position and deshabille were such that propriety would have made him turn away in distress, or disgust, but he was spellbound.

This clairvoyant review of Lillibet's seduction didn't include sound, but he did tune in on the climax and wave after wave of passion swept over him as he slumped, transfixed. The old jade by this was burning herself. The heaved herself painfully to her feet. A chaise lounge was close by; its spindly legs and soft contours were fully capable of supporting both of them. Lady Hatton was in something of a stupor what with wine and satiation, but sinful Queen Bess dragged her to her feet and over to the lounge, there to sprawl her out again and ease her own length beside the girl.

"Thinkst thou to have all the pleasure, my pretty?"

But Lillibet was an utter stranger to Lesbian dalliance. This finger-tip exploration by one of her own sex was new to her. In her aroused, relaxed condition she responded readily enough to the Queen's stimulation, but when Bess in turn grew passive in expectation of reciprocation the girl was dilatory.

"Rouse up and about your business!" Bess swore a most unqueenly oath and pushed Lillibet uptto a sitting position.

From thence the girl could easily survey the field of play and make a strategic move to the unhallowed spot but she sat transfixed, that horrible chancre on the Queen's thigh! With dizzying suddenness she knew the reason for Bess's limp and that steel crutch, and recoiled in horror.

Itching with concupiscent impatience, Bess grabbed the girl's hand and applied it to the burning fount of all life.

"Oh, no, I cant!" she exclaimed, trying vainly to withdraw from the clutch of the bony old claw.

Bess swore again, vulgar, savage in her rage. Holding Lillibet's tender, white, shrinking hand in her own, she grasped the first finger and forced it backward and upward. The sharp crack of the breaking bone shattered the silence and the girl's shriek filled the jewell box with an agony of sound.

In the game room a dozen yards away Francis Bacon's entranced revery was shattered, too. Physically or astrally he heard that scream and it brought him bolt upright out of his trance. Dazed and with only vague, confused memories of his dream he set the wineglass down and struggled to his feet, limbs aching in protest. Where was he? What had happened? It must be early morn. As he tottered toward the doorway a sleepy servant mumbled "good morrow" to him.

Meanwhile pain and anger had shocked Elizabeth Hatton completely out of her sensuous, alcoholic lethargy. She bounded from the chaise lounge on suddenly lithe, 19-year-old limbs as the old lecher clawed and cursed after her. The door to the jewel box was close by. She jerked it open with her good right hand and a lady-in-waiting, stooped at the keyhole, came sprawling in. Lillibet kicked her on into the room with a bare foot and rushed out, slamming the door behind her.

Around the corner she almost ran into a man-at-arms, standing imperturbably in helmet and breastplate, his steel-tipped lance at attention. Across from him a page slumped on a bench, half asleep; but he jumped to his feet, startled wide awake by this dishevcled but lovely apparition, holding one hand limply in the other. The path to freedom lay between them, down that long, long corridor.

"Pardon, m'lady," said the page. He made as if to detain and question her.

Looking past him down the hall she saw a familiar figure leaving the door of the game room, otherwise the place was empty.

"Fr-r-r-r-r-r-a-a-a-n-n-n-c-i-i-i-s-s-s!"

The page turned and saw the reassuring, well-known form of the

young lawyer, long a familiar at court. Lillibet, ignoring the hurt, gathered up her farthingale in her hands and fled, straight into his arms. She sobbed incoherently and trembled from shock. Tears of shame, mortification and anger, streamed down her cheeks. Francis held her close and quietly for a moment, breathing soothing phrases in her ear.

"The Queen! The Queen!" she sobbed, shaking her head in disbelief. "This horrible palace, I cant stand it!"

She tried to push him away and to flee down the hall but Francis restrained her.

"Wouldst rouse the guard?" he admonished her fiercely.

He swung his cape over her bare shoulders, striking her hand in doing so. She turned white and whimpered, and stumbled as they walked along. It was only then he saw the evidence of the injury. Already the finger was angry red and swelling. The break itself was white.

"The monster," he breathed in astonished belief. "Oh, God, the unspeakable monster!"

Francis knew only too well what had happened. This was not new. Now to get her out of the palace as quietly and quickly as possible before his vindictive old mother might raise a hue and cry -- accusing the girl of God knows what crimes. Righteous indignation and fierce, protective anger welled up in him as they hurried along in the flickering torchlight, past the guards ever watchful of the welfare of the nation's monarch.

The Queen's political and social life being what it was, this was an old story, a courtier hastily escorting a charming English lass from the court in the early morning, even if she was somewhat the worse for wear; but it was something of a surprise to see Master Francis Bacon, barrister and gentleman pensioner to the Queen, doing it. No breath of scandal had yet touched <u>his</u> name.

So, the flight to the courtyard was unhindered and unheeded except for a knowing look or two between Francis and the officers of the watch. Lady Hatton sobbed softly under his cloak. A footman summoned his brougham. It was only then, as they stood on the cold, damp stones of the courtyard, that Francis realized she was barefoot. He picked her up and carried her across the mud, waiting impatiently while his man Jones got the door open.

"St. Bartholomew's hospital," he said quietly.

"A hospital?" said Lillibet in wonderment and disbelief. "I want to go home!"

Even in the warm, protective circle of his arms, she shook. Waves of trembling swept over her and she sobbed uncontrollably.

"Canst thou trust me, Lillibet?" Every word he uttered was a car-

ress. "Thou hast a most grievous injury. My good friend, Dr. Timothy Bright, is in residence there now, down from his rectory at Morley. He hath a clear eye and a steady hand in these matters. His surgeon's skill was learned under fire at Zutphen and Grave. Wouldst have a crooked finger to mar the flawless beauty of thy form? Thy finger must be set now and St. Bartholomews lies not far off our path."

It was a long, tedious and rough ride up old Kent road to the Bridge and across, through Cheapside and up Aldersgate to the hospital. In spite of the jolting, exhaustion took over and Lillibet fell asleep in Francis' arms. He dozed fitfully and unconcerned. Jones knew the way from many such travellings, though this early morning hour was a bit unusual, not to mention the sex of his master's passenger.

It took time to arouse the servants and dawn was cracking the eastern sky. It was an astonished doctor, still in nightcap and nightshirt, who came grumping to the anteroom.

"Decent people get sick in God's good daylight!" His bushy gray eyebrows shot up to light a heavy face above a stocky, heavy body and he pushed his candle forward almost into Francis' face. "Ho, it's Mister Bacon! What rouseth thee out at this ungodly hour, man? Ye're not sick!"

"Have no fear, good Dr. Bright." He signaled the servant out of the room with a slight gesture, but even then spoke closely to the old man's ear. "Not for myself but for a lady in desperate plight. The Queen hath done it again and the poor creature's at your door now in my carriage."

"So the lady wouldn't play, eh? Is that it? Ho, ho-ho, ho-ho-ho-ho! Bring 'er in while I find meself some clothes. Beauty must be preserved and the ventures of the night repaired by dawn's early light."

This last was sung out while the old man stomped stiffly and heavily away, his candle light casting monstrous shadows on the bare walls of the institution. It was clean. Francis let himself through the heavy door but allowed it to stand open. At the carriage he found Lady Hatton mercifully asleep. Jones helped him to get her in his arms again and he carried her in, her face muffled over with his cloak. There would be scandal enough without the hospital help breathing her name about. He could trust Dr. Bright, an old and honored friend, and fellow student of the Mysteries, to keep a still tongue. He had finished his dressing and was ready for them.

"Bring 'er in 'ere," he said gruffly but kindly as he gestured from a doorway off the anteroom, set up for emergencies like this, no doubt.

Francis set her down gently, hoping to let her sleep through the suffering ahead if that were possible. His aura of love and compassion seemed to keep her content but as soon as Dr. Bright touched her she awoke with a start and gazed wildly at the strange, bare surroundings.

"There, there, my dear," he said as he laid her injured hand out on the table beside her chair.

"Elizabeth, this is my good friend, Dr. Timpthy Bright," said Francis, quietly, reassuringly. "Dr. Bright, Lady Elizabeth Hatton."

The good doctor was all business and only nodded as he assayed to straighten out the hand, palm down.

"Ye must have dawdled along the way," as he observed the angry swelling with expert eye. "Old jade's at Greenwich, is she not? Hast been long?"

"Not more than two hours," replied Francis.

Elizabeth was mute with fear and shame, and anger. She did cry out when he straightened the finger and dug her nails of her good hand into Francis' arm. Even when the doctor applied Balm of Gilead she winced but its fragrance filled the room and brought comfort to both of them. From a supply of splints he selected one of appropriate size and length and gently bound up the broken finger.

"Now, if ye behave yourself, lass," he said kindly, "the swelling should go down in a few days and we'll be needin' to wrap it anew; for straight it must be. There's two wrappin's 'ere. The outer one's bound to soil. Replace it as often as need be."

No sooner was the finger set than Lillibet got sick! Dr. Bright reached hurriedly for a handy basin and retrieved it just in time for her to pewk into it. Francis held her head, kept a steady, warm hand across her heaving, trembling waist.

The two men agreed that the woe-begone, pasty-faced beauty was in no shape to travel. A private room was available. They stripped the unresisting Elizabeth of her farthingale, "cumbersome folderol" the doctor called it, and put her to bed in her shift. She clung to Francis' hand with child-like simplicity until sleep came, the sleep of utter exhaustion and alcohol.

"'Tis well ye stole her away from her Majesty," observed the good doctor. "She's safe from harm 'ere at St. Bartholomew's."

"Yes, but there's no camouflage for that finger. Tongues will wag. The scandal will be all over London in a day," replied Francis with a glum shake of his head.

"Aye, but sleep now, and her youth," observed Dr. Bright, "and she will be well fortified for the morrow."

"Lady Elizabeth will be needing it. Cecil will be furious when he learns his niece rejected the old crow's advances." The young lawyer shook his head. "His hold upon my mother is beyond all understanding."

"There lies your answer, lad," replied the doctor, pointing to the

sleeping Elizabeth, "supplying her Highness' bedchamber with the choice beauties of the land. Not to change the subject, Morley's out o' the way of things up there; rumor has it that the Queen's thinkin' of callin' another Parliament."

"That she is, Tim. The Treasury's low. The price of everything is out of sight - - "

"Includin' the cost o' makin' war!" interrupted the doctor. "Are you going to be in there, fightin' for our rights in Commons? Or are Cecils going to have their way there, too?"

"And earn the Queen's displeasure as I did in '93? I dont know, Tim." Francis shook his head wearily as though the prospect of a political campaign, and a lengthy battle royal with the Conservatives was too much for him then.

"Ah, ye're tired lad. Come now, we'll find a bed for ye."

But first Francis went out to the drowsing Jones and sent him on to Hatton House to leave word of its Mistress's whereabouts and to his lodgings at Gray's Inn for a change of clothes, a few hours of rest and return to St. Bartholomew's. He was to stop at Hatton House again on his way back, there to pick up Lady Hatton's personal maid and a few things for her, as discreetly as possible. Dr. Bright found a bed for Francis and he lay down, thankful for what sleep he could get before the busy day ahead.

CHAPTER THREE

To Strike A Blow For Freedom

"Rouse out there, Mr. Bacon! Yer man Jones is here, with a maid pretty as her mistress!" It was the cheery Dr. Bright at the door of his room.

The hospital smells and sounds soon reminded him of where he was. As the events of the night before flooded through his sleep-benumbed brain he threw back the covers and swung his feet to the floor. This promised to be a full day indeed. The sun was high and the City was already long about its business. Jones helped him with his clothes. The man was a tow-headed Anglo-Saxon, of about his master's height but wider, and with the strong, capable hands of a craftsman.

"Is Lady Hatton up and about?"

"Aye, Mister Francis, and Bridget is with her."

"Good. I trust she'll be ready for a bite of breakfast shortly. Was all quiet at Hatton House when you fetched Bridget?"

"I dont rightly know, Mister Francis. Sir Hugh Beeston had been there, asking after her Ladyship."

"Hm--m-m-m-m-m-m, her uncle Cecil's man, and no one there knew her whereabouts. Here," as Francis sat down by the window, "quickly now."

Jones draped a white cloth around his master's neck and over his shirt before giving hair and beard a quick trim.

"Nor do they now, Mister Francis. Sir Hugh had left when I arrived, saying he'd be back again."

"Did you breathe aught of your destination to Bridget?"

"No, sir."

Bacon smiled his satisfaction. While completing his dressing he sent Jones to see if Lady Hatton would honor him with the pleasure of her company for breakfast at Charterhouse Inn. When Jones returned quickly with the reply that she would indeed, the young lawyer's joy knew no bounds. Could this mean that the youthful beauty was at last responding to the love so long carried within his own heart? Time would tell. Jones followed with the dressing case under his arm as

his master led the way back to the receiving room of the night before. There he settled accounts with Dr. Bright and a clerk and parried skillfully his good natured jests about the minor tragedy that brought them to St. Bartholomew's the night before. Then she arrived.

"Good morrow to you, m'lady," said Francis and with a gallant bow took that bandaged left hand so tenderly in his and gently brushed fingers and bandage with his lips.

"Good morrow to you, Francis, and Dr. Bright," and to their questioning glance she said simply, "it hurts and I'm hungry."

So perfect was her toilette, so radiant her youthful beauty that there was no indication of the harrowing events at Greenwich only a few hours earlier. Besides, Bridget was as excellent a maid as Jones was a valet. Dr. Bright accompanied them out to the waiting carriage as the servants followed with their bundles. After final instructions on the care of her bandaged and splinted finger they were on their way to Charterhouse, only a few squares away.

"What is your pleasure this morning, Elizabeth?" asked Francis.

"What is yours?" she countered quickly. "I have no desire to see Sir Hugh this morning, nor to face my uncle Robert -- not until this evening at Hatton place. I wish you'd come."

"With the greatest of pleasure," he replied with alacrity, "that is, if all goes well at the Curtain this morning."

"The Curtain? This morning!" she replied with surprise and delight. "But the Chamberlain's men perform only in the afternoon. Hast thou seen their latest, Richard III?"

"That I have, more than once. Didst thou like it?"

"Aye, Francis. Henry Burbage quite carries me away," she sighed over the remembered thrills of seeing and hearing the actor's magnificent performances. "But my uncle hates it. He says that Richard III hath been drawn too close to life."

"If it is not too bold to ask," said Francis evenly and just enough to be heard above the clatter of the carriage wheels and the horses, "whose life?"

"His, of course," replied Lillibet directly. "I thought everyone knew that! He'd stop it if he could."

Francis only nodded in reply, smiling slightly. He looked at Bridget, sitting primly beside her mistress.

"What thinkest thou of masqueing, good Bridget?"

"Oh, m'lord," she exclaimed, raising her hands in protest, "'tis the work o' the devil and not fit for decent folk to see!"

"Well, it's prayin' ye'll be this marnin';" replied Francis as he and Elizabeth laughed at her, "far to the theatre your mistress goes and the rehearsal of Richard II."

Lillibet clapped her hands in delight but grimaced in pain from that finger, only momentarily though.

"Francis, canst thou really make the entrance to rehearsal? 'Tis said it's forbidden."

"We ha' the privilege," he nodded, "but first a bite of breakfast cheer at Charterhouse. I've been hungering for Chillingsworth's eggs, bacon and butter this past hour!"

Jones would have let them off at the main entrance to this justly famous inn but Francis waved him on around to the side, not quite so conspicuous. He then took Bridget back to Hatton Place, but only after Lady Hatton had admonished the maid to breathe no word of her whereabouts to anyone.

"Not even to Daphne, mum?"

No, not even to Daphne, Lady Hatton's year-old little darling of a daughter.

Inside the door they were welcomed by Chillingsworth himself, big, hearty, clean-shaven but for immense, handlebar moustaches, his mark of distinction. The host showed them to a secluded alcove of Francis' choosing, from where they could see but not seen too readily.

Lillibet was agreeable. The strange mixture of feelings which crowded her mind and heart this morning required careful study, and consideration with a trusted friend. The lawyer opposite her in the booth wasn't that, quite yet; but he was partner to some of the calamitous events of the night before -- how much more he suspected she scarcely dared think! This all made intimate what for a month or so before had been a much more formal courtship in which Francis was competing with several other very eligible suitors. In late June, Francis had induced his brother, the Earl of Essex, to write a letter to Lady Hatton's father and guardian, Sir Thomas Cecil, commending the barrister's suit for her hand.

Court life had thrown them together at many an event, public and social, over the past three years; but Elizabeth was now Lady Hatton and he was still nothing but a gentleman pensioner of the Queen, famed for little else but brilliant teaching of the law, and with no title, land, nor prospects of his own. But Francis Bacon's name was spotless and he had a reputation for sincerity and honesty rare in those times. With their order taken she turned to him in her direct way.

"Francis, hath my reputation been compromised beyond repair?"

"Only to the degree you allow, Lillibet," he replied just as dir-

ectly and kindly. "Thou art not the first to be so treated in the jewel box; but few there be who have resisted the old Jade's advances to merit such distinction as this."

Her hands, her lovely hands, were on the table before him. He smiled encouragingly at her and placed his right hand carefully and tenderly over her injured left.

"Dost bother thee?"

"It aches," she replied but as he offered to withdraw she covered his hand with her own, "but not so much as that. Methinks the hurt is more within my heart. What will my friends say?"

This last was almost a wail and a tear cuursed down her cheek.

"Take the high side of it, m'lady," Francis urged upon her. "Wear that finger as a badge of the honor thou didst save. What else can you do?"

The waiter then showed up to set the table and they sat back for a moment. A snow white cloth was before them. The gleaming silver was placed and savory cups of mulled, spiced wine promised a heady start for the rest of the morning. Francis lightly proposed a toast. Lillibet smiled through her tears in response. Then she worried about the time he was spending with her.

"Surely you know it's 'tween terms of Court and my students are home -- or should be. I ha' a small interest in the Curtain and the masques of Will Shacksburr."

The lawyer had a nobleman's taste for fine food, fine clothes and the exquisite surroundings of a cultured and refined gentleman. This was well known in London but the source of the wherewithal to pay for it was the subject of considerable speculation. To answer the questions in Lillibet's eyes Francis decided to be equally frank with her. Love Love melted away some of the reserve about his private affairs, carefully cultivated for years.

"Thou knowest there was precious little left to me by my honorable father, Sir Nicholas."

"Some have it," she replied, "that thou receivest a stipend from the Queen."

"A pittance, a bare pittance," he replied somewhat bitterly, "scarcely enough to afford this very often." He gestured at the sumptuous breakfast being served to them. "And the carriage which brought us here."

"The practice of law before the bar -- surely that is an honorable profession, by which much can be earned?" suggested Lady Hatton hopefully.

"I'd rather teach law than practice it," replied Francis drily, and he concentrated on his breakfast for the moment.

This young widow before him had extensive properties in and out of town. These needed expert management to produce ready cash so necessary in these depressed, troubled times. She had a year-old daughter now under the care of her nurse at Hatton Place. The little girl would need a father. Both were thinking of these things as they ate. The titled beauty before him offered Francis a great step forward could he but lead her to the altar, but what had she to gain by handing control of her life and fortune to this young barrister whose source of income was so obscure no one knew quite whence it came.

"It appealeth little to me, standing before the bar for years to come, pleading for John o' groats," continued Francis. "To move men's minds, to correct the laws by which the barrister doth practice, there is a goal worthy of the highest!"

"Thou sayest it well," she replied approvingly.

"Others would have me take up the profession of arms, under the banner of my -- my Lord, the Earl of Essex --""

"Yes," she interrupted excitedly, "he and Raleigh must be in the Channel now, on their way to Corruna. Oh, to be a man and take sword against Catholic Philip!"

"Aye," replied Francis, "and whilst Essex carries the war to the enemy without, what of the Catholic enemy in London? Where we fight with words, with ideas? This is my chosen battlefield, Lillibet, here in the City, where Papists work openly to bring scandal and ruin to her Majesty's government.

If we keep not the watch here,
Who will protect the Earl's rear?"

Lady Hatton was sipping her steaming wine when Francis came out with this little rhymed couplet, and almost sprayed him with the laugh that followed. As she dabbed at the droplets on nose and chin with snowy linen napkin, Francis, aroused to his theme, continued.

"Why are we importing corn from the Continent when thousands of sturdy yeomen, more than ready to work the land, stand idle? Isn't it Catholic nobles who make more popular the chase? Enclosing more valuable farm land for deer runs? The very sinews of our land are the farms and the men who work them, producing the raw substance of our military might. If we are to triumph over Spain and the Church, tillage must be increased, not decreased. Thousands of idle men must be put back to work on the land from whence they have thoughtlessly and heedlessly been driven."

"Bravo!" cried Lillibet and almost clapped her hands in response to the man's patriotic fervor.

"There are watchfires need tending close about us in the City and the fuel by which we feed them is ideas, to stir good men to action, for honor and country. While the Earl sharpens the edge of his sword, I sharpen my good quill pen and cut and thrust with words."

He paused as they applied themselves to the last mouthfuls of good bacon and eggs. Lillibet considered this revealing turn to the barrister's conversation without comment. Then he continued.

"We must haste to the Curtain, Lillibet, where the rehearsal of Richard II should be in progress. It must be ready for presentation on the morrow."

"Didst thou write it?" she asked in amaze.

"Shall we say I ha' a hand in it." An enigmatic smile twitched the corners of his lips.

"But Richard III is doing so well," she protested. "I'd like to see it again, though my uncle Robert hates it. He says Richard looks like him."

"Cecil compared to a king of England and he liketh not the honor?" Francis raised his eyebrows and hands in mock astonishment. "But there are thousands who do enjoy our mummery and masquing. It diverts them from the toils and troubles of the times, and we can teach the mob something, using the great kings and nobles of our glorious past as exemplars."

"But why must Richard III come to an end today? 'Tis a most excellent play and it draweth well."

"Aye, Lillibet, but the Swan hath a new play every afternoon! We do well to keep one on the boards a month. Richard III endeth its run today. Fickle is the fancy o' the mob and Lord Chamberlain's men must yield to the pressure of the times. Profit cometh before poesy."

He smiled, almost ruefully it seemed, as he raised his wine to her, in a last salute to her, and to Charterhouse's delicious breakfast. Lady Hatton responded in kind. He turned the fine cup in his hand a moment as he held it at eye level.

"To the great success of Richard II," he said.

"To the great and glorious success of Richard II!" she exclaimed.

Francis called for his bill and ordered the carriage up. While Lillibet repaired to the lady's room he sympathized with Chillingsworth over the price of corn and the scarcity of other foodstuffs.

"If I cant set a decent table," Chillingsworth threatened, "Charterhouse closes its doors."

"What thinkest thou is the cause?" asked Francis, "Hoarding or enclosures."

"Both," replied the Inn host promptly, but he leaned across his counter to speak closely to the barrister's ear. "It's this driving good men off the land that's doing it. There's villains among us 'ud rather see England brought to 'er knees, an easier prey to Phillip and the Pope!"

By this the radiant Lady Hatton had come and plain Mr. Bacon proudly escorted her to his waiting rig.

"To the Curtain," he said to Jones, "but I would stop by Paul's."

Lady Hatton had settled herself and they were on their way, winding through London's crowded Aldersgate toward the river. This was a holiday for Lillibet. Away from the administrative affairs of her own busy household she was free to be carried along in the stream of the hitherto unsuspected activities of this busy and talented man.

It was foolhardy of Francis Bacon to reveal so much of his central place in the liberal political party of his day. After all, Lady Hatton was niece to Bacon's life-long enemy, Robert Cecil, the central figure in the conservative opposition. But she was beautiful and he was in love with her. With all London at her feet he had to make the most of this day.

Jones found a standing place in the Churchyard, over-crowded with waiting horses, coachmen and vehicles.

"An Sims hath kept his promise, I ha' a gift for ye," said Francis as he excused himself to hurriedly leave the carriage and disappear into the huge old cathedral that was London's market and meeting place. Shortly he was back with a slim, new volume in his hands. Ordering Jones to be under way again, through Cheapside and onto Bishopsgate and Shoreditch, he got in and proudly handed her the book.

"I'll inscribe it for ye at the Curtain, if ye wish!"

She turned it wonderingly but awkwardly in her hands, opened to the title page and read this, half aloud.

"The Tragedy of King Richard the Third. Containing His treacherous Plots against his brother Clarence: the pitieful murther of his innocent Nephewes: his tyrannicall usurpation: the whole course of his detested life, and most deserved death. As it hath been lately Acted by the Right honourable the Lord Chamberlaine his servants. At London, Printed by Valentine Sims, for Andrew Wise, dwelling in Paule's Churchyard, at the signe of the Angell, 1597."

She looked up at Francis as they jolted along, silently for a moment. "But there is no author. Mr. Bacon, didst thou write it?"

He returned her gaze, longing to take public credit for this work

of his pen but he dared not, not yet, to one so close to Cecil. He looked away and said slowly, "Let us say it is the work of several hands."

"But why was not Richard II played first, and then Richard III?" she asked, "As history doth have it."

"Because it doth not suit our purpose. We would teach some and warn others that corruption leadeth to a sad and inglorious end. Both the people and their leaders have long forgotten that kings can lose their crowns for stupidity and vice. When Bolingbroke returned from an unjust exile in 1399, the land was in turmoil, with vast social problems ignored or unsolved on every side, just as today, July 27, 1597. The sad, inglorious end of Richard II can be a mirror for our times and come the morrow, we intend to hold it up for all to see."

"But is it not treason?" she protested.

"Was it treason in 1399?" asked Francis firmly. "The people and the Lords deserted Richard by the thousands and flocked to Bolingbroke. Without followers Richard could do nothing and had to resign! We English know that kings can be deposed for incapacity and maladministration."

The audacity of this line of thinking left Lady Hatton stunned for a moment. Such a glimpse behind the seething political turmoil of London was too much for her and she sat staring at Francis, overwhelmed by this new and unsuspected power, strength and purpose in the London dandy before her.

"If thou wouldst have evidence of vice in high places, m'lady," he reminded her gently, "ye need only look at the bandaged hand afore ye."

Reminded again of the night before and the cesspool of corruption from whence she fled in anger and terror, Lillibet flushed and turned away from him, covering her left hand with her right. Her own part in the assignation was to be buried in the farthest corner of her mind. Thus forced back on herself momentarily, she busied herself with her own thoughts and covered with a feigned interest in the busy streets of Bishopsgate. They were now going up the main thoroughfare leading down from the north of England across London's famed and only bridge, the gateway to the south and Dover.

The tension in the carriage was relieved by their arrival at the Curtain. Lillibet was too thrilled to be at the famous playhouse as a privileged guest to be concerned about the impropriety of a Lady being there in the morning hours. Francis Bacon's importance to the place was obvious from the familiarity and the deference with which he was received. This lent new weight to his remarks, made on the way up from St. Paul's.

"Rehearsal's been on for moren'n hour, Mr. Bacon," said the watch-

man at the stage door. He touched a forelock. "N' Mr. Shakspur's taken sick with the King's evil, went up to Stratford yesterday."

Francis thanked him for the information and with a nod to stagehands and waiting actors, led Lillibet around to a box seat in the gallery, close up front.

"Our lands, our lives, and all are Bolingbroke's,
And nothing can we call our own but death.
And that small model of the barren earth
Which serves as paste and cover for our bones."

"Hmpf," murmured Francis half to himself, "is the morn so far gone? Act III, Scene II."

"Sh-h-h-h-h-h-h," Lillibet placed a restraining hand on his arm, not to miss a word as the magnificent Burbage rolled out the immortal lines.

"For God's sake, let us sit upon the ground,
And tell sad stories of the death of kings:--
How some have been deposed, some slain in war;
Some haunted by the ghosts they have deposed;
Some poisoned by their wives; some sleeping killed;
All murdered: -- for within the hollow crown
That rounds the mortal temples of a king
Keeps death his court: and there the antic sits. . . "

In a huge wooden chair down front in the pit sat Heminge, with a prompter and script beside him. This "throne" was usually occupied by the vast bulk of actor-manager Will Shakstpur. It would have held two of Heminge; for he was tall and thin, sandy haired and with a long, pock-marked nose. Burbage, full-figured and handsome in his regal robes, continued on:

"Scoffing his state, and grinning at his pomp;
Allowing him a breath, a little scene,
To monarchize, be feared, and kill with looks;
As if this flesh, which walls about our life,
Were brass impregnable; and humored thus,
Comes at the last, and with a little pin
Bores through his castle-wall, and -- farewell,
king!
Cover your heads and mock not flesh and blood!
With solemn reverence; throw away respect,
For you have but mistook me all this while;
I live with bread like you, feel want, taste grief,
Need friends: -- subjected thus,
How can you say to me, I am a king?"

The Bishop of Carlisle hesitated over his response to this and the prompter was slow in giving him the cue.

"Bravo," came a feminine voice from the gallery at left and a bit

of applause which Lady Hatton immediately regretted because of that bandaged finger.

Heminge turned abruptly and frowned up into the shadowed box. He was in full sunlight. He turned to the prompter beside him in astonishment.

"It's Mr. Bacon with some jade!"

This was rare indeed. Their playwright seldom appeared at the Curtain except as one spectator among hundreds, too risky otherwise. But to bring a lady friend to a rehearsal was strictly forbidden, and Shagsburre, Heminge and Condell were all business when it came to making money with the art of the Masque. Burbage made a sweeping bow in the direction of the hitherto unsuspected audience but Heminge waved him and the others on to finish the scenes.

Another interruption came from another source in the middle of Scene IV, the last of Act III. The two gardeners were on stage and clearly protrayed the pith and purpose of Bacon's earlier statements at Charterhouse.

> "Go thou," said the gardener, "and like an executioner,
> Cut off the heads of too-fast growing sprays
> That look too lofty in our commonwealth:
> All must be even in our government --
> You thus employ'd, I will go root away
> The noisome weeds, that without profit suck
> The soil's fertility from wholesome flowers."
>
> "Why should we, in the compass of a pale
> Keep law and form and due proportion," replied a servant,
> "Showing as in a model, our firm estate,
> When our sea-walled garden, the whole land
> Is full of weeds; her fairest flowers chok'd up,
> Her knots disordered, and her wholesome herbs
> Swarming with caterpillars?"

While the servant actor was painting this poetic picture of England's shoddy condition, an auburn haired man of medium height, well dressed and clean shaven except for a small moustache, appeared as if from nowhere and walked quickly out into the pit to Heminge. From under his arm he produced a package. This he handed to the director.

Heminge quickly unwrapped it. It was a play manuscript. The messenger pointed to something on the back of the loosely stitched bundle of paper. Heminge looked up at him with a smile and turned and gestured at Bacon in the box, looked at the stage and waved the actos on to finish the scene and the act.

"I believe the wind of fortune hath favored our course," said Francis to his companion, and excused himself to join the three at front center in the pit.

"Dame Fortune is wi' us, Mr. Bacon!" exclaimed Heminge to him as he came over to them. "Harry's done it again and the Master o' the Revels hath approved every word!"

Bacon looked quizzically at Harry Percy, the auburn-haired bearer of the precious manuscript of Richard II.

"Aye, Francis, and good morrow to you," he said exultantly and with the familiarity of many years of close friendship and service. "Master Edward Tilney's signature is properly affixed to Richard II and 'ere's the receipt for seven shillings from the office of the Master o' Revels in Clerkenwell."

"Knowest thou what this means?" asked Francis of them as he took manuscript and receipt. Heminge was right. There at the bottom of the last page was the bold, black signature of the Queen's censor, and his stamp of approval.

"Aye," replied Heminge soberly, "Act IV is in, just as thou hast written every word of it."

"On the morrow all London will know that English kings can be deposed for misgovernment," said Harry.

"And the day after that we'll all be in the Clink for treason," added Francis soberly.

"But 'ere's the Queen's approval," protested Harry, pointing to Tilney's signature.

"Sh-h-h-h-h-h-h," said Heminge, raising a hand in protest to silence them. On the stage above an 18-year old lad, beautiful in royal raiment and makeup was playing the part of Richard II's queen:

"Come, ladies, go
To meet at London, London's king in woe. --
What was I born to this, that my sad look,
Should grace the triumph of great Bolingbroke?
Gardner, for telling me this news of woe,
I would the plants thou graft'st may never grow."

With majestic movement and slow, the Queen moved weeping off the stage with her "ladies", and the gardner turned to the audience with the last solemn lines of Scene IV, Act III:

"Poor queen! so that thy state might be now worse,
I would my skill were subject to thy curse. --
Here did she fall a tear; here in this place,
I'll set a bank of rue, sour herb of grace;
Rue, even for ruth, here shortly shall be seen,
In the remembrance of a weeping queen."

The curtain came down smartly after the gardner's last words,

only to part almost immediately as Henry Condell strode out to the footlights in the costume of Bolingbroke. He was short and dark as Heminge was tall and fair, all business, quick and nervous. He spied Francis Bacon for the first time, apparently.

"Mr. Bacon," he exclaimed with a pleased smile, "it's a pleasure to have you here, sir. Now, gentlemen, some decision must be reached on Act IV. We cannot equivocate any longer!"

"Decided it hath been, Condell," drawled Heminge as Bacon walked over and handed the manuscript up to him. "We ha' the Master o' Revels' approval."

"'Pon my soul," breathed the stage manager and actor as he looked carefully at the signature and then at Francis.

"The die is cast, my friend," said Francis to him quietly, "On the morrow we strike a blow for freedom."

"Aye," said Henry Condell thoughtfully, nodding his head and rubbing his chin, his businesslike manner gone for the moment as he contemplated this bold step from play-acting into national destiny.

"Treason be damned," he said and turned abruptly to go through the curtain to his noisy backstage empire. "Set up for Act IV," he shouted clearly above the hubbub, "All of it!"

Francis returned the uncensored manuscript of Richard II to Heminge, congratulated Harry Percy on a morning's work well done and returned to the box and beautiful Lillibet.

CHAPTER FOUR

Cecil Lays His Plans

While the treasonous play of Richard II was being rehearsed at the Curtain in Shoreditch that morning, elsewhere in London, at a sumptuous palace on the Thames, two gentlemen were discussing ways and means of stopping it. This was the home of the Queen's Secretary of State.

Cecil had called the Bishop of Worcester in. Actor-Manager Will Shakespur was the bishop's moral responsibility, along with several thousand other Londoners who lived across the river in the suburb of Southwark, in the Liberty of the Clink. At this time Will had rooms there while not living at home in Stratford.

"Your Lordship," said Cecil, "it hath long been my suspicion that Master Shak'st spur is not himself capable enough, and hath not knowledge enough to have writ the much admired plays that we rate so high, and which are supposed to be his."

"Many another hath had the same suspicion, Sir Robert." The good Bishop nodded his head with a knowing smile.

"We have good reason to supppse that the poor creature, Morelow, slain in a tavern brawl in '93, was a masque for some gentleman writer of Dr. Faustus and Tamburlaine. His untimely end did put upon the writer the need for another nome de plume. Actor Will is a poor, dull, ill-spirited, greedy creature and but a veil for every masque prepared under his name by some gentleman."

"Aye, your Lordship," the Bishop nodded vigorously. "We have long thought thus was the truth of it ourselves. Make of the man a prisoner. Bind him with iron and bring him before the Council. It is more than likely the Knave will speak the truth and tell who writ the plays put forth under his name."

Cecil nodded his head as though this were a commonplace, which indeed it was, to bind a man without charge, in irons, and torture him if necessary; but his mind was still on that crisis four years earlier when Francis Bacon lost his first play-writing masque.

"These plays were put abroad at first upon the stage in the name of Morelow, a woe-begone, sullen fellow. He had engaged in a quarrel with one Archer, a servant, about a wanton, ending in a bloody, hand-

-to-hand fight, in which he was slain. The point of his own sword struck against his head and eye, making fearful wounds. My father would, in his wrath, have burned the horson rascally -- yes, forsooth -- knave alive in the fire at Smithfield for the sin he had committed against Heaven and the state."

"God's will be done," agreed the Bishop piously. "Atheism doth bring all to a sad end. First Morelow and now Will."

"How so, Sir John?" asked Cecil.

"One day I did chance to meet Will and although I am well acquainted with him I would not have known him, the transformation was so great. He beseeched me to come with him to visit his father, who was sick. 'Go along, I entreat you, to supper with me. I will give you excellent sack, my worshipful Lord.' We talk of his sick father. . . "

"But what of the actor, Will," interrupted the Queen's Secretary of State, "your Lordship spoke of a transformation."

"Shaktspur is not more than thirty-three yet he is, in his youth, written down with all the characters of age. His cheek is white, his voice is hollow, his hand dry, his hair gray, his step feeble; and his head wags as he walks."

"The wages of sin," observed Cecil. "What thinkest thou is the cause of all this?"

"There is a beastly wound new-healed on the side of his neck," said the Bishop, raising his hand to his fat throat for emphasis, "and a great wen or gall, something like the King's Evil, which every day grows greater and his strength more feeble. He is flattering himself with the hope and expectation that he will get well. He thinks he is yet young and that his case is not so bad. He is eating away his life. He cannot escape the grave."

"No cure hath been found for the King's Evil," agreed Cecil, "but her Majesty's justice may speed him on his way out of his wasted, vile life."

The Bishop of Worcester shifted heavily in his robes and continued his mournful tale.

"It is thought Will must have that dreaded disease they call the French, which is one of the most incurable of all diseases. There is, in truth, no remedy for it. It seems to draw all the substance out of one, and leaves only emptiness and weariness."

"It was, I have heard, brought hither in the reign of King Harry, the father of the present queen, in 1515." Not to be outdone by the Bishop, Cecil thought to add a bit of history to the tale. "In the war against the French our foot soldiers entered Holland and the Low Countries. They fortify the town of Gan-Gate. Our forces take it after a

hard fight. Our men become too familiar with the women of the place -- and when the King and his forces marched back to England they brought it along with them. It hath made sad destruction among the poor lewd people of this town."

"And actor Will among the worst of them" vigorously agreed the Bishop. "He is a gross, fat and untaught rogue, full of his own most beastly desires. A glutton rather over-greedy than choice. With his quick wit and his big belly, weighing three hundred pound. He is extraordinarily fond of the bottle."

"Wasn't he in great poverty in Stratford?"

"Aye, your Lordship," replied Sir John, "but now his coffers are full. After each masque they divide the money into three equal divisions and his own part by now is five hundred marks or more. He hath bought a goodly estate called New Place, and he is going to pluck down the old house, which is gone to decay, and build a great one in the spring in Stratford, fit for a prince."

"So-o-o-o," observed Cecil thoughtfully, with pursed lips, his long fingers clasping and unclasping before him.

"Indeed, the surveyors are now engaged and the foundation walls are part up. His pretty daughter, Susanna, to whom he is much endeared, hath a sweet visage and is well taught. Such money is ill spent for a man of his station in life. He not only wants the right to bear arms as any gentleman, he seeketh to have his father, John, knighted!"

"Hath the actor any trace of quality in his lineage?" asked Cecil in his measured, colorless tone.

The Bishop snorted and shifted his fat body ponderously in his chair, and shook a ring-covered finger for emphasis.

"I can assure your Lordship he hath not a drop of gentle blood in his body. His father is only a coster-monger's son, who at present wrought at the trade of glove-making. But it is the dearest desire of his heart to make his daughter a lady and advance himself among the file of the quality."

Cecil allowed himself the trace of a smile as he asked if Shagsburre had approached the King of Arms in this matter. Yes, it seemed that Deathick had had the request for a coat of arms for John Shagsburre's family under consideration for nearly a year!

"But Sir Thomas Lucy and other quality of Stratford consider it a bold plot. His Lordship is very much incensed. He hath written to Deathick not to consider it or allow it! But the aristocracy of the neighborhood fear that Will's friends here in London will secure him a coat-of-arms. They fear his influence with the Queen because of the Plays he hath written."

"Is Sir Thomas of the belief that Will Shakspere authored the

Masques put out in his name?"

"Heaven forbid!" the Bishop raised his hands in horror. "The lout had no schooling. He can neither read nor write. Sir Thomas and his neighbors tell the King of Arms that Shagsbur never writ the plays. He hath neither the wit nor the imagination."

"The Plays are much admired," observed Cecil grudgingly. "They draw great numbers and yield great abundance of fruit in the form of groats and pence."

"Aye, his purse is well lined with the gold he derives from the Plays. He hath bought great store of tapestry, plate and hangings for New House when it is finished." The Bishop of Worcester shook his head, a determined prophet of doom. "He will not live to enjoy his grandeur. He repents now in sackcloth and ashes the lechery of his younger days."

This discussion finally stirred Cecil to a slight show of emotion. He flashed one knowing look at Sir John and turned his tell-tale eyes down and away from the cleric toward the window as he spoke.

"This rude and vulgar butcher's apprentice is neither witty nor learned enough to write for any stage. The subjects are far beyond his ability. He is a masque for some gentleman about the Court."

"It is even thought here your cousin, Francis Bacon, writes them," blurted the Bishop.

"If we could only prove it," said Cecil evenly, with just the suggestion of an edge to his tone.

"Your Lordship," the Bishop leaned forward earnestly, "Will Shakstpur is no longer poor, nor are the other leaders of Lord Chamberlain's company. Thinkst thou they will risk the loss of their heads or their goods to shield the man who writ the Plays? Clap him in irons! Bring him before the Council! It is more than likely he will speak truth and tell who writ them!"

"Suppose he lies."

"Put his limbs to the Question," replied the Bishop bluntly, as though having a man tortured were one of his common enjoyments. "Force him to confess the truth."

This call to action seemed to stir Cecil. He stood up from his desk, bringing the interview to an end. As a mark of respect for the holy man, who had outwardly confirmed his own long-held thoughts on the course of action, Cecil walked him to the door of his office study, assuring the Bishop that he would see the Queen without delay. Suiting the action to the word he ordered up the Bishop's coash and his own barge. Saying farewell and thank you to his guest his eye swept the long line of suitors in the outer hall. They could wait, as they always did. To the swarm of secretaries who would have followed him in to his office he shook his head.

"Not now," he shoook his head firmly, "we go to Greenwich, immediately. Hath Sir Hugh returned? I want him."

Sir Hugh Beeston was one of several fashion-plate bed-fellows Cecil kept about him, handy for all kinds of business, public and otherwise. So familiar was he to the Secretary of State that he could enter without knocking, and did, before Cecil was fairly seated again at his desk. He lookedup, the question unspoken. Beeston shook his scented head.

"She's not been seen at Hatton House this morn, your Lordship; nor did her Ladyship return last night."

"And no word sent?"

"Yes, sir, she sent for her maid and new clothes."

Without invitation the dandy moved casually and gracefully over to the chair lately occupied by the Bishop and sat down carefully, not to disturb his gorgeous attire. A perfumed side curl was tossed carefully back over his shoulder.

"'Tis thought there her Ladyship is still at Greenwich."

Cecil leaned back in his chair, speculating thoughtfully on all the implications of his niece spending an entire night and morning bedded with Queen Elizabeth. Beeston produced a jewell-encrusted snuff box from his purse and offered some to Cecil before dosing himself, but the hunchback waved it away.

"Her Grace hath taken a fancy to our niece, a most pleasant prospect for her -- and for us." Cecil smiled slightly.

He might have made a further observatinn on this favorable turn of affairs when there was a discreet knock on the door and a secretary entered with papers for the Secretary, also word that his barge was ready for the quick trip down to Greenwich. He ordered the secretary to place them in a dispatch case for his more leisurely perusal while boating.

"Shall I accompany your Lordship?" asked Beeston.

"No," was the peremptory reply. "Be thou my eyes at the Curtain this afternoon for the last performance of Richard III, and tomorrow afternoon for the first performance of Richard II -- and its last!"

So saying he led the way to the door and on out of his palace, stopping only long enough to be hatted and cloaked, impatient of his valet's worried attempt to make this misshapen caricature of a man presentable for an audience with the Queen.

On this bright, warm 27th of July Queen Elizabeth was enjoying a walk in the gardens at Greenwich with her maids, helping herself along with her steel crutch. The Thames was never lovelier in the late

morning sunlight, with gaily colored barges moving by, an occasional merchantman from overseas and fleets of dazzling white swans maneuvering gracefully along the shore. A page approached and dropped on his knees. Resignedly, Elizabeth gestured one of her maids to query him. There was never a moment of peace anywhere, it seemed. The maid returned and curtsied.

"Your Highness, the Secretary of State is most urgent -- "

"Would there was a time when he wasn't urgent," she rasped. "We'll see 'im."

The maid nodded to the page and he was up and away.

Shortly the monster lurched and tottered to her presence. He looked in vain for his niece among the pretty creatures around her but dared give no hint of the burning curiosity within him. Unless the Queen herself broached the subject of last night's revels that must wait. Her maids needed no urging to withdraw at a discreet distance from this blasted tree of a man. He went to his knees and began the usual preamble of nauseous praise and flattery so necessary to her monstrous ego.

"Be on with it, man!" she stopped him with an impatient wave of her hand. "Why disturbest thou the gracious quiet of our meditations this day?"

"Hath your majesty been informed of the latest play of M'Lord Chamberlain's company?"

"Only that it hath been performed a fortnight and more at the Curtain. My ladies have it that Master Burbage made a most regal Richard III. Methinks it would entertain us well at Christmastide."

"Your Grace," Cecil replied slowly and deliberately, "Richard III is killed every afternoon and the Groundlings clap up a storm of approval daily. If it please your Grace, this is matter most treasonous. The peace and honor of your kingdom are sore threatened."

"Tut, man, wouldst thou have Will Shagsburre and his men re-write history?" Elizabeth smiled indulgently at him. "Tis well known that Richard III, though a true English king in many ways, lacked those very virtues which have kept me successfully at my post these many years."

She had been standing, leaning on her crutch, expecting this interview to be of short duration. Now she abruptly sat down on a handy stone bench, as though the weight of thirty-nine years on the throne of England was suddenly too much for her. As she seemed more disposed to hear him out, Cecil persisted.

"They say, your most royal Highness, that whoever writ the play of Richard III made that king's deformities a living portrait of your Secretary of State; and that when Richmond doth best the hunchback king in swordplay and take his life every afternoon at the Curtain the crowd greatly approves. Some even say aloud, 'tis a proper end for Cecil!"

"Tosh, man!" the Queen laughed in disbelieving protest. The idea of this blasted tree of a little man before her, with his wolf-fang teeth, this fool -- taken for a king of England?

"My man Beeston heard it!" There was more irritation and impatience with Elizabeth in his voice than was his wont.

But she was in no mood to take him seriously this morning. It was just too quiet and peaceful there in the sunlight along the Thames. She had heard well of this play, Richard III. Her ladies had all seen it, more than once. They had taught her those immortal lines which always brought a roar of applause from the Groundlings, and from the boxes of the Quality as well. She now spoke them exultantly herself.

"Let them not live to taste this land's increase
That would with treason wound this land's peace!
Now civil wounds are stopped, peace lives again,
That she may long live, God say amen!

"These lines read well, Robert Cecil; we like them; and they will bear much repeating these days. What would you man? That we shut down London's theaters?"

"The Bishop of Worcester would have it so."

"An overfed cleric," she replied contemptuously, shrugging her shoulders, "too long in office and ignorant of mortal needs."

"His honor, the Lord Mayor of London, would have them shut down."

"Humph," she snorted, "that old fool! He doth ever exaggerate the importance of his post. Are there not already too many idle men in London? Wouldst thou put a thousand watermen out of work?"

She shifted impatiently on her bench. That open wound or chancre on her thigh was bothering her again. After last night's debauchery she was in no mood for discussion of statecraft but wanted peace and quiet herself. She dismissed him abruptly by turning her back on him.

"If thou wouldst discourse of treason, study it among the Jesuits crowding our shores!"

CHAPTER FIVE

THe Last Performance of Richard III

"A horse! A Horse! My kingdom for a horse!"

In royal armor the crippled hunchback stands in the center of the stage and shouts the now immortal line of Richard III. This was its last speaking and the Groundlings in the Pit of Curtain theater in Shoreditch stood enthralled, as they had every day for the past month.

It was late afternoon and the sun was still high to light the stage as the evil career of Richard III neared its end. Behind him swords clashed, actors shouted and fought out the dramatic end of the war between the houses of York and Lancaster. Catesby rushed up to him.

"Withdraw, my lord: I'll help you to a horse."

The hunchbacked king snarled at him like a trapped rat.

"Slave, I have set my life upon a cast,
And I will stand the hazard of the die;
I think there be six Richmonds in the field.
Five have I slain today instead of him --
A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!"

Thrusting Catesby roughly aside, Richard III turned and dashed off through the seated dandies at stage right. As the actor king, Henry Burbage ran behind the most prominent of these, he managed to kick the stool out from under him before disappearing in the wings. It was Sir Hugh Beeston. As Cecil's spy went down with a squawk of protest, hat in one direction, sword in the other, a roar of guffaws from the Pit momentarily broke the high tension of the drama. Embarrassing of the Quality like this was always good for a laugh. The delight was even more accentuated because the larger part of the audience were followers of the Earl of Essex, leader of the opposition party to the Cecils! Back in their box, Francis and Lillibet joined in the glee.

Widowed in March, Lady Hatton had sincerely mourned the sudden passing of her husband, but this proud beauty was too full of the fire of life to be long held down by custom. True, she wore mourning black much of the time but she wore it with style. Her widow's weeds were most becoming indeed! and warn for public approval in spite of the pointed criticism of her more conservative Cecil relatives and elders. She resented their intrusion into her affairs. She felt perfectly capable of handling them herself; so she took double pleasure in the public discomfiture of her uncle's boon companion, Sir Hugh Beeston.

But she had thoughtlessly clapped her hands together when Sir Hugh went down. Now she was in pain and in the shadowed seclusion of their curtained box, Francis welcomed the opportunity to move close, reach across her lap and gently place his right hand over her injured left.

The warmth of his vital presence cast a soothing glow. He placed his left arm lightly across her shoulders, touching her upper arm. The healing forces flowed through the circuit; the pain in the finger disappeared with magical ease. Lillibet had unconsciously tensed at his first move. Now she leaned back, relaxed, in this protective circle, her eyes still on the stage.

"How did you do that?" she breathed, wondering.

"Where the mind goeth, the body doth follow," he replied gently. "There is a current of love that healeth. It floweth from right to left, or left to right."

He emphasized the idea by squeezing her lightly with first his right hand and then his left.

"Conjoined this way the waters of life flow, as through a pipe cleared of all obstruction."

They were close, so close, and the heady fragrance of her perfume caused quite another current to flow, causing a tingle from head to foot. Francis moved his left hand from Lillibet's shoulder to her cheek, turned the full lips to his and kissed her in a long, hungry embrace.

On stage King Richard and Richmond appeared at stage right, their swords clashing a martial symphony to the tender scene in the shadows of the balcony above. The swinging blades formed a halo of sinister light around the two as Richard slowly but surely gave ground across the stage.

When Richmond forced the hated king into the shadows of stage left there was another roar from the thousands in the Pit. Shouts and cheers came from the galleries. Surely this was the best yet from the mysterious playwright supplying the Curtain's scripts. He, at this moment was lost to another reality! But his partner started up at the roar and the pounding of the feet of the enthusiastic viewers in the boxes on either side of them.

Francis would fain have tasted again the sweet nectar of her lips during a brief lull in the fighting, on stage and off, but a blast of trumpets shattered that mood for good. A victory? For the hunchbacked usurper, Richard? Of for the cause of righteousness and the end of tyranny? Richmond appeared in triumph and Stanley was beside him, bearing the crown. The packed Curtain roared again. Richmond, stage center, faced the audience.

"God and your arms be praised, victorious friends;
The day is ours, The bloody dog is dead."

Stanley, with a sweeping gesture, proffers him the crown.

"Courageous Richmond, well hast thou acquit thee!
Lo, here, this long usurped royalty
From the dead temples of this bloody wretch
Have I plucked off, to grace thy brows withal:
Wear it, enjoy it, make much of it."

With royal grace did noble Richmond accept it. He placed the circlet of gold and jewels carefully upon his brow.

"Great God of Heaven, say amen to all." He looked upward prayerfully as he spoke. There was another round of applause from the Pit and the galleries. He turned to Stanley.

"But tell me, is young George Stanley living?"

"He is, my lord, and safe in Leicester town,
Whither it please you, we may now withdraw us."

He bowed low before England's newly crowned king.

"What men of name are slain on either side?"

"John, Duke of Norfolk, Walter Lord Ferrers,
Sir John Brakenbury and Sir William Brandon."

"Inter their bodies as becomes their births;
Proclaim a pardon to the soldiers fled
That in submission will return to us;
And then, as we have taken the sacrament,
We will unite the white rose and the red; -- "

Stanley turned back to the assembled stage troops behind them as the audience cheered this last statement. Richmond turned full to the front again and moved with stately steps to the edge of the platform. No word of this finale should be lost on the multitude. The sunlight gleamed on the hush of their upturned faces.

"Smile heaven upon this fair conjunction,
That hath long frowned on their enmity!
What traitor hears me, and says not Amen?"

Many a fervent amen rose from the Pit in response. These Englishmen assembled were thinking, not of Richard III's time, but of today! Today's England had a ruthless, hunchback cripple clawing ever more power and wealth unto himself, the Secretary of State, Sir Robert Cecil. The caricature was drawn so true to life who could miss it? 'Twas rumored Robert was in the pay of Catholic Spain!

"England hath long been mad, and scarred herself;
The brother blindly shed the brother's blood.
The father rashly slaughtered his own son,

The son, compelled, been butcher to the sire,
All this divided York and Lancaster,
Divided in their dire division, --
Oh, now let Richmond and Elizabeth,
The true succeeders of each royal house,
By God's fair ordinance join together."

Again Richmond was interrupted, this time by cheers and shouts of "God save the Queen!"

"And let their heirs, -- God if thy will be so --
Enrich the time to come with smooth faced peace
With smiling plenty, and fair prsoperous days!
Abate the edge of traitors, gracious Lord,
That would reduce these bloody days again,
And make poor England weep in streams of blood!"

And again he was interrupted from the Pit. The Groundlings by and large had embraced the State religion. Richmond's words were too true, with Spain threatening war at every moment and thousands of Catholics still in the land, and Jesuits searching and probing for every weak spot in the government, sowing dissension, discord, hatred and corruption wherever possible.

"Let them not live to taste this land's increase
That would with treason wound this land's peace."

This telling thrust brought a rousing cheer. The nobles and the landed gentry had forced thousands of sturdy yeomen off the land with their passion for Enclosures, to make deer parks and sheep runs. His eager listeners quiet again, the actor delivered the last lines:

"Now civil wounds are stopped, peace lives again;
That she may long live here, God say amen!"

An ovation of applause, cheers, hurrahs and many a fervent amen closed this last performance of Richard III, with Henry Burbage playing the leading role. He returned on stage to stand with Richmond, Stanley and the others to bow deeply again and again to round after round of applause from the rapidly thinning audience. As always for many, there was a rush for the exits and the taverns along Holy Well Lane and Shoreditch.

The lovers in box thirteen had to move too, though they were reluctant to do so. Before opening the door to the box Francis boldly took Lillibet in his arms again.

"Knowest thou how precious this day hath been?"

Responding to the delicious length of him, she impulsively threw her arms about his neck and kissed him.

"These hours I'll treasure," she breathed softly against his cheek.

She placed her hands on his shoulders and pushed back slightly from his embrace. "Last night's hurt is clean forgot!"

He kissed her in response to the warmth of her gratitude. They stood there, locked together, savoring each tender moment to the full before the world must be faced again. Not that their parting would be for long; there was the carriage ride home and the gathering at Hatton Place that evening.

Francis opened the door and peered out into the press of people in the passageway behind the boxes. Some knew him and nodded. Beeston was nowhere in sight; perhaps he had gone out by another way. Not that the two expected their presence at the Curtain would go entirely unnoticed. Robert Cecil had many, many informers. Somehow, they hoped this blossoming of romance into the fuller flower of passion would remain secret, but it never does. They inched their way along the crowded corridor and moved outside with the throng, heading toward the carriage yard. Even as Francis caught Jones' eye and turned to his elegant Italian style brougham --

"Ah, there you are, m'lady!"

It was Beeston hurrying up to them, but Francis didn't stop, forcing Sir Hugh to tag along, now beside them, now behind as they threaded their way through the crush of people and vehicles.

"Good day to you, Sir Hugh," acknowledged Francis. Lady Hatton only nodded to him.

"Didst thou know thy uncle and thy father hath had me searching for you all this day?" Sir Hugh was irritated.

"No, I did not. Why should they concern themselves of my whereabouts <u>this</u> day. Send to Sir Robert that I am well and that I witnessed a superb performance of Richard III in the company of Mr. Francis Bacon," she replied firmly and with a triumphant smile. They were at the carriage and Jones held the door for her. "You can tell Sir Robert that I am most grateful for his concern and look for his august presence at Hatton Place this even, thank you."

She flashed a brilliant smile of warm approval at Francis as he assisted her in.

"Hatton Place," he said quietly and firmly to Jones and entered the brougham himself, with only a brief nod to Sir Hugh.

The discomfitted knight could only turn away to avoid the dust kicked up by Bacon's magnificent team of fawn-tipped grays and find his way to nearby New Inn tavern. This gave him a view of the entrances to the Curtain, while he slaked his thirst.

Inside, at the office, Bacon's man, Harry Percy, was already seated opposite Henry Cundell, the groats, pence and shillings of the

day's take piled high on the desk between them. It was all business. The coins were counted and stacked, counted again, then divided equally into three piles. Percy carefully slid the playwrite's third into a capacious purse and tied it securely to the sword-belt at his waist.

Harry signed a receipt for Francis' share, expressed his concern over the illness and absence of Will Shake-speare. As he walked out, the cleaners were busy making their scrubdown but the Curtain was otherwise momentarily quiet. It would be busy enough again in the evening with final preparations for the opening of Richard II on the morrow. He slipped quietly out into the afternoon, the late sun guilding all with bright gold. In the nearby yard a waiting groom came up with his horse. His tip received a hearty "thank'ee" in reply and he headed his mount along Holy Well Lane toward the welter of traffic on the Shoreditch road to the City.

All England moving north or south used London Bridge, it seemed. Day and night, through Shoreditch moved an endless stream of carts, wagons, horses, people mounted, people on foot, sheep, cattle, pigs, and of course there were the heavy, sumptuous carriages of the Quality. It was a stinking, sweating, dusty thoroughfare that early summer evening, alive with the thrust and drive of Elizabeth's England.

There were open fields in Shoreditch, north of London, when Burbage's father built London's first theater, The Theatre, in 1576; but now, in 1597, Shoreditch was a crowded suburb of the bursting city. Several years earlier he had had to build a second theater, The Curtain, to take care of increased business. Then of course there were the Rose and the Swan across the Thames, bankside, playing to thousands daily, and the Globe was a-building. None of these theaters were in London proper, the old city within the Roman walls, and the loss of business had the Lord Mayor appealing to the Queen's Privy Council for help. But Queen Elizabeth was an enthusiastic playgoer herself. Besides, where would the various companies of players essay new scripts, trying for that prize plum, command performances for the Queen and the Court during the Christmas holidays?

With the playwrite's share of the profits from the last performance of his latest masterpiece safely in hand, Harry Percy allowed the stream of traffic to carry him steadily along toward the river and Bishop's Gate, through that and on around to Grace Church street and Cheapside.

He stopped at St. Paul's, to settle the dust of the road with ale in the handiest tavern, and to read the Playbills. He was curious to see what was playing at the Swan, Langley's big new theater in Southwark, finished just this year across the river. There was a new company there sponsored by the Earl of Pembroke, Pembroke's company, and the current offering was "The Isle of Dogs" by Tom Nashe and Ben Jonson. This company promised a new play every day! That would take some doing. Shagsburre, Burbage and company were glad to let a popular play run two weeks, even a month if it drew well, and Richard II promised that.

Paul's was the news center of London, or gossip center. Percy

chatted and listened long enough to learn that word of Richard III had spread widely indeed and that many saw in the crippled, hunch-backed monarch a caricature of the hated Cecil. There was another subject of discussion that came up frequently at Paul's, the price of grain! Money was scarce. London was crowded with unemployed yeomen forced off their land by Enclosures, and the government was allowing merchants to import "corn" as it was called, from across the Channel, because English grains were out of reach in price and scarce to boot.

So, heavy with money and news, Percy rode on out through Ludgate, along Fleet Street, past the Devil's Tavern -- where laughter and song, the smell of ale and roast beef sorely tempted him to stop again -- and on up Chancery Lane.

His goal? Gray's Inn and a set of rooms still honored today by the presence of the Master Lawyer who lived and worked there when he was in town, Francis Bacon.

Percy knocked but awaited no invitation to enter, as one long accustomed to the run of the place, a trusted companion of the 36-year old lawyer-playwrite. The quarters carried an air of disordered elegance, as suited the taste of their brilliant tenant. Francis had preceded him home and at the moment was dictating to one of his secretarys, Thomas Burton. It seemed that there were always one or two about and all were trained in the system of modern shorthand created by Bacon himself. The Art of Brachygraphy he called it, and had it published under the name of his good friend, Dr. Bright.

He broke off his dictation to watch Percy empty the purse into an unlocked chest at one side of the room. The metal made a pleasant clink, clink as it fell on the substantial quantity already there. At Francis' quizzical look he made reply.

"Elbow to elbow in the Pit, m'Lord, and all London in the galleries, on the last day as well as the first. 'Tis a pity we must give up Richard III for Richard II. That Burbage is a rare one! If Cecil didn't see himself in that hunchbacked scarecrow. . . "

"Yes, Richard III scored a hit, Percy, and London hath seen cousin Robert for the scoundrel he is. How much hath Robert seen? A score of performances and no sign, no word, no strike from Greenwich."

Bacon sat back relaxed in an easy chair, one slightly gouty foot with the shoe off on the hassock before him, his right elbow on the arm of the chair, cheek and chin cupped meditatively in his hand.

"What Cecil hath not seen he hath heard, from Beeston," said Percy, his face breaking into a smile as he remembered the on-stage episode that afternoon.

Francis laughed and clapped his thighs in glee.

"What causeth all this merriment?" asked Burton.

Percy then told in great detail the discomfiture of Cecil's spy, upset and dumped on the stage by Burbage. It would have been funny anyhow, but that it happened to a despised and intimate member of the hated Secretary of State's entourage made it doubly enjoyable and they roared with laughter. Percy was so weak that, with the abandon of long familiarity, he flopped himself into the handiest chair and sprawled his legs out across the rug.

Burton had put his notebook and quill aside but as he picked them up again and glanced at Bacon, he saw the latter looking expectantly at the door. Was it presentiment that a familiar form would soon be standing there? Or had he heard the noise of a step from outside? It was his brother, Anthony Bacon, decked out for an evening on the town. Then Francis turned to Burton and nodded his dismissal.

"Tell Jones I'll be dressing shortly."

Putting notebook and quill aside again, somewhat resignedly, Burton stood and left the room. On the way out, however, he stopped by the chest and helped himself to a handful of coins, this to the visible annoyance of Anthony, who said nothing about it. His brother's carelessness where money was concerned was of such long standing he'd given up trying to reform him.

Brother? Not of the flesh, these two, but of the Spirit. There was no faintest resemblance between them, except perhaps in the dark hair. They sprang from different loins; but goals and ideals were the same; thus common insterests and mutual admiration held them together with an unbreakable, loving bond enduring throughout their lives.

"The French disease hath gotten the better of Shagsburre," said Francis to Anthony, "he rid up to Stratford yesterday for the care of his wife and daughter -- scarcely capable of holding his head up."

"And Richard II," queried Anthony. "Is it to be played?"

"This morning's rehearsal went as well as can be expected under Heminge's direction," replied Francis. "The deposition scene is in."

Anthony was on his way to the sideboard for wine. He paused at this rare news and looked from Francis to Percy.

"Aye, 'tis true," exulted Harry Percy. "Tilney's name is at the bottom o' our script, big as life!"

"By all the Saints and Thomas," Anthony swore softly, "this is rare indeed." He continued on to the sideboard and set up three glasses. "The Master o' the Revels hath furthered our cause. We'll drink to that, Harry, take one and give one to our Master o' Metre."

Francis favored that tender foot ever so slightly as he stood on it, but he moved readily to the center of the room with the other two and they clinked glasses.

"To the blasted drama!" said Anthony. "May it be the end of tyranny and the beginning of liberty!"

The two echoed it after him and they downed the wine. Anthony went back to the sideboard for more, but Francis and Harry had had enough. Heavy drinking of the new wines was fashionable now -- a good excuse for dissipation and Anthony had probably already had enough before arriving. He ruminated that at Walsingham House one didn't even have to go to the sideboard for wine, the servants kept one's glass filled! What a hostess was Lady Essex, and what a beauty, the widow of Sir Phillip Sydney. Anthony gestured with his refilled wine glass.

"Suppose cousin Robert takes this tale of his Richard III caricature to her Majesty?"

"We have only portrayed Richard as told in the Chronicles," Francis shrugged his shoulders philosophically, "if Cecil sees himself in the hunchbacked, unfortunate Richard. . . "

"Cecil had an audience with her Grace this morning. I learned it from Southampton," observed Anthony.

"Aye?" responded Francis.

The three exchanged looks, pregnant with concern over the perilous course the Plays were taking them. Anthony broke the silence.

"Remember, there's an evening at Lady Hatton's. Let's be off. I feel lucky tonight and the cards may run my way."

Francis excused himself to go dress and Anthony urged more wine on Harry Percy as the two sat to talk in the book-lined room.

Their former good patron, the Earl of Essex, had lately set the pace for the new dissipation. The headstrong Earl, bullheaded as his real mother, the Queen, was no longer counselling with the Bacon brothers as he had for years past. He had new advisers who played to his passions rather than his ideals, who encouraged his vices for their own gain. Too many of them were Catholic for the Bacons' taste, Sir Charles Danvers and Sir William Howard, for instance. Francis Bacon and Robert Devereaux, the Earl of Essex, had quarreled earlier that summer over this very issue, before Essex rode down to Plymouth in June. He was to head the new expedition against Catholic Spain and the Fleet had to be outfitted. Francis was now looking for a new, powerful patron at court.

"Ah, well. . . " Anthony heaved a deep sigh and drank deeply of his wine, as Francis came back into the study. "Aye, 'tis a fine figure ye'll cut tonight, Francis." He surveyed his brother's apparel with approving and critical eye.

The buckles on his slippers glittered with jewels. His nether hose were white silk interlaced with the finest of needlework of gold and blue thread. The satin bows at the knees were bright orange-gold.

Francis' trunk hose were silk also but a contrast of deep blue and free of any ornament. His doublet was all satin, of vertical panels contrasting in scarlet and bright yellow; however, it was only moderately padded out. Tony's doublet was so heavily padded it was awkward to sit down, so he remained standing where possible! Nor was Francis' ruff elaborate as it might have been for that summer season of 1597. It was brilliant white and perfectly starched; Jones was tops at that; but it was not so wide as to make eating and drinking a bother. For his cloak that evening Francis Bacon chose his favorite color, a velvet creation of deep violet. Some might have called it royal purple and royal he was by birth. The lining of the cloak was brilliant, flame-orange which flashed with startling suddenness on the beholder as Francis raised his arm or the wind flicked it suddenly open. It was a showy pair of brothers indeed who went a-courting that fragrant July night.

THE NATURAL SONS OF QUEEN ELIZABETH BY HER MORGANATIC MARRIAGE WITH THE EARL OF LEICESTER

FRANCIS BACON

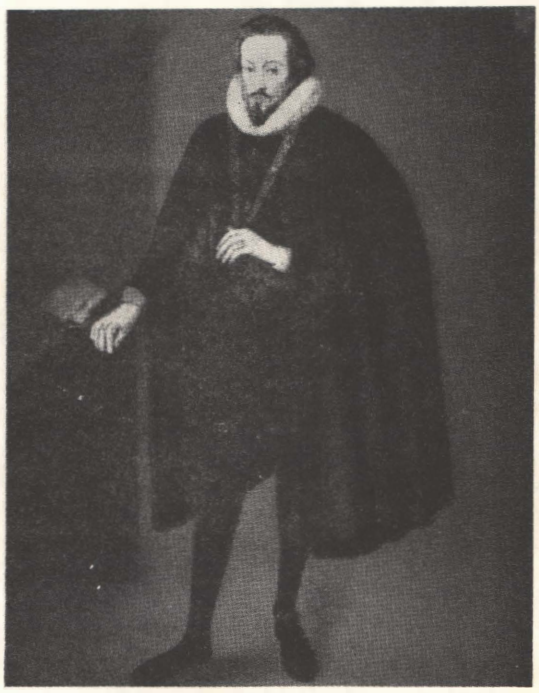
THE EARL OF ESSEX

From *The Tragedy of Francis Bacon*, Harold Bayley.

These are the portraits of two brothers, sons of "the Virgin Queen". They were the last of the Tudors. They are known to the world as Francis Bacon and the Earl of Essex. The likeness between them is remarkable and is plain for all to see when one's attention is directed to it. If they are compared with Leicester and the Queen there can be no doubt of their parentage.

SIR EDWARD COKE

ROBERT CECIL, EARL OF SALISBURY



From the portrait at Woburn Abbey

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CHAPTER SIX

An Evening At Hatton House

Outside, Francis paused to savor the carressing summer air of the evening but Tony moved resolutely to his carriage. He was courting Lady Luck that night and eager for the tables.

"To Hatton House," he ordered the coachman.

It was only a square or two away. Lady Hatton's sumptuous residence had onee belonged to the Bishops of Ely. In earlier years Elizabeth had taken the palace away from the Bishops and given it to her favorite bed-companion of the time, Christopher Hatton. After all, she made Christopher Lord Chancellor of England for his services; so he needed a mansion suitable to his station as the top lawyer of the land. But the old shrew loaded it down with a mortgage of 42,000 pounds, still owing her when Hatton died in 1591. Satiated with him, the Queen had broken his heart by turning to greener pastures.

Hatton had never married; so at his passing the palace with its seventy-two foot banqueting hall, its exquisite chapel of delicate stone work, all went to Hatton's nephew, Sir William Newport. He changed his name to Hatton and moved in with beautiful young wife, Elizabeth. When he died in March 1597 she became one of the best catches in London; for in addition to the Bishops' famous palace in London, Sir William had left her Corfe Castle on the Isle of Purbeck and the magnificent place of Holdenby in Northamptonshire. Yes, Lady Elizabeth Hatton was an attractive catch in many ways to the landless young nobles of London, and to ambitious young lawyers, too!

Francis and Anthony were no strangers to Hatton House with its magnificent gardens, orchards, paved courts and splendid gateways. The cultured Bishops of Ely had built with a style which suited Francis' elegant tastes perfectly. Furthermore, it was centrally located close to his favorite part of London, Gray's Inn, the Inns of Court and Court itself when the Queen was at Whitehall.

In the carriage, Francis gave Anthony some of the details of the night before as he knew them: the Queen's attempted seduction of Lady Hatton, the broken finger, the flight from Greenwich to St. Bartholomew's Hospital, and the day spent with him at the Curtain.

"All goeth well with thee in the matter of the heart," observed Anthony sagely.

"Hast thou no sympathy for her Ladyship?" asked Francis

"Aye, that I have," replied Anthony, "but great heart doth win fair lady and you have rescued a damsel in distress, under the most intimate circumstances! Press your advantage to the full, Francis, methinks thou art far, far in the lead for the hand of fair Lillibet."

"And I win, we will have made an alliance with the Cecils," Francis looked glumly out of the window of the cariage.

"With ample means to console your conscience," Anthony was mildly cynical. "Furthermore, the Lady Hatton must be rather more sympathetic to our cause, now that her Majesty hath alienated her loyalty to royalty. How did she react to the rehearsal of the deposition scene in Richard II this morning?"

"She was shocked at the suggestion of treason in it, of course; but she exulted in the justice of Bolingbroke's cause -- and ours. She be one of us."

"As for the alliance with the Cecils," Anthony continued, "hast forgotten the Earl's dinner with Robert and Raleigh in April?"

Francis shook his head. He hadn't forgotten it and considering his own recent course, a letter to Lord Burleigh, Cecil's father, seeking favor from that powerful man; and now his own love affair with Cecil's niece --

"My brother was first to blur the line twixt our cause and theirs," Francis agreed soberly. "He hath made it expedient for me to do likewise. The Earl hath set a course afoul with storms and rocky reefs. No harbor do I see there."

"Mayhap," replied Anthony, "but he still hath the Queen's affection, and he be victorious at Coruna and return laden with Spanish gold?"

"Aye. All glory to the magnificent Essex," said Francis with a touch of sarcasm. "Meanwhile the rats gnaw away at our vitals in London whilst we strike at them with a paper sword!"

They were at Hatton House by this.

"The beauteous Lady offers a bewitching combination of circumstances indeed," said Anthony with a quizzical smile.

"Aye, ye have spoken well," replied Francis, ducking out as the footman held the door. "Who knows in what direction they might lead."

"Well, you joust wits with society while I win at Primero. The cards must run my way this night."

They anticipated a full and charming evening as they left their carriage at the entrance to Hatton House. Stylish to the nines, Lil-

libet's servants were gorgeously decked out. She had an efficient and knowing butler, Higginbotham, who served her establishment well. Francis' senses responded quickly to the light and color of the beautiful place as they made their way into the great hall, aglitter with the shine of hundreds of candles.

Not quite all London was there, Essex and Raleigh and their lieutenants were either at Plymouth, superintending the final outfitting of their ships, or already in the Channel and on their way toward Spain. But there were the Cecils, Thomas and Robert. There was Sir Robert Sydney and the Irish earl, De Burgh, and a dozen others of both sexes.

At one end of the hall card tables were placed. Anthony soon found company there, but not before he stopped by the sideboard for wine. At the other end, musicians played. Sitting nearby, as though enjoying the concert, were Sir Robert Cecil and Edward Coke. This was the man who had won the Queen's Attorney-Generalship over Francis Bacon. There seemed to be a natural antagonism between the two and it was probable they would face each other in Parliament this fall -- and the Queen should summon one. It was quite likely that she would. She needed money to finance the undeclared war with the Roman Catholic Church and Spain.

But this wasn't what the two were talking about as Francis glanced their way. It was about Lady Hatton's extensive properties, not debt-free by any means, and in such a legal tangle of wardships and leases that only a land-lawyer could make sense of it. Coke was that. His own country of Norwich had been covered many times, on horseback and afoot on law business, from one end to the other. Sir Robert fully hoped Edward Coke could put Lady Hatton's affairs in order. For what devious purposes who could tell? If Elizabeth Hatton hadn't been so closely related to him he might have had an eye on her himself. Cecil was free. His wife had passed away in January, and there was the beauteous and available Lillibet, the center of a bevy of young nobles, laughing and jesting.

"Mr. Bacon!" It was Cecil's man, Sir Hugh Beeston. He had turned from the admiring group around Lillibet. "Our fair lady here tells us your -- the latest masque at the Curtain, Richard II, will surely outbid Richard III in popular favor."

"The playbills ha' been out a fortnight," Bacon replied by way of answer as he moved easily into the circle.

Lady Hatton extended a dainty hand, the uninjured one, which he saluted with a graceful bow and a touch of his lips. He squeezed and held it ever so slightly before letting go and was rewarded with an answering gleam in her laughing eyes as she withdrew it quickly to touch a bit of silk ribbon at her bosom. The two snowy globes were cushioned in orange silk and bare to the nipples, after the fashion of the day.

"Sir Hugh will have occasion to remember the closing performance of Richard III for some time," she laughed.

Beeston touched his right thigh gingerly and smiled ruefully.

"That scoundrel, Burbage, kicked my stool from under me this afternoon," he growled, "had I any idea who put him up to it I'd run him through."

He pulled his ready sword a way out of its scabbard and rammed it back in again. "Besides, I like not this play. I like not seeing a king hunchbacked and dragging his foot around the stage. There's treason in it."

"Know you not your Chronicles?"

"History tells us that Richard III was a crippled hunchback," observed Francis quietly, "Wouldst thou have the playwrite rewrite history?"

"'Tis too much like Her Majesty's Chief Minister," growled Beeston, nodding toward his master, Cecil. "I like it not. I like not seeing an English king deposed from his throne by the rabble. There's treason in Richard III," he said over his shoulder as he walked toward the sideboard for a drink.

"Mr. Bacon," said one of the other dandies with mock disapproval in his voice, "how did ye know our Secretary of State was like unto Richard III?"

"Mere chance," the lawyer shrugged in reply to the double edged remark and nodded slightly toward Lillibet. "Begging your ladyship's humble pardon,,I have ever loved the study of England's noble rulers. The Chronicles of Holinshed are a part, a well-studied part, of my library."

"Will Shaktspur and his company have an admirable playwrite who turns out one excellent script after another, good properties," observed Richard De Burgh. "Richard II will have a long and profitable run, no doubt."

"Aye," chimed in another of Lillibet's admirers, "'Twill relieve an otherwise dull summer."

"'Tis action ye want?" asked De Burgh. "Lord Essex could well use another sword at Ferrol -- once they get there."

The young noble shifted uncomfortably. The Catholic bias of his ancient House was no secret. Neither was it a secret that a renegade Jesuit sometimes said Mass in his father's private chapel, but Queen Elizabeth closed her eyes to such subversion when it suited her.

Francis Bacon was ready to relieve the tension with a jest or a quip but he was saved the effort by the appearance of two famous London beauties. They entered with a flourish in the company of an equally handsome -- nay beautiful -- young man, the Earl of Southampton. They

were Lady Essex and Lady Rich. These two were a welcome addition to any gathering, except at Court. Having earned the displeasure of the Queen, they were denied access to the Presence. Lady Essex, widow of Sir Phillip Sidney, had impetuously married Essex. Neither of the two had sought Elizabeth's permission or favor. It wouldn't have been granted anyhow. Lady Rich was living in open adultery with Lord Mountjoy after having born a batch of children to her husband, Lord Rich! And he was just that, rich.

With these rivals to Lillibet's beauty in the great hall the press of admirers around her thinned out somewhat and Francis captured her full attention and person for a dance. He would fain have found some quiet spot for those tender moments which nourish love but after all, she was the hostess.

"How's the finger?" he asked from the side of his mouth as he held her at arm's length, touching lightly that injured hand; for this number put him to her left side as they glided down the floor.

"It hurts!" she whispered forcefully, looking straight ahead.

Then they went into fours, pivoting quickly around a center, right hands clasped across in an X. Lillibet found it awkward to hold up her skirt with her left, but she managed. She made no effort to hide it -- impossible anyhow -- and already speculation was rife among the guests as to just when, where and how the injury was received. Some had been at Greenwich the night before. Lady Hatton's hands were clean of a bandage then! Nor had the Queen's marked attentions to her gone unnoticed. It didn't take long to put two and two together. Elizabeth's intimacies with certain of her twenty-eight maids of honor were no secret, and what her courtiers didn't know, they suspected!

Thus as Francis and Lillibet whirled and glided around the great hall with the glittering throng, speculation, gossip and scandal whirled about them, individually and together. On the side, Coke and Cecil watched the two with more than usual interest. Four years earlier, the post of Attorney-General had become vacant and Coke and Bacon were rivals for the choice legal position in the Queen's government. Essex drove her to distraction, badgering her for the post for his brother and her son, Francis; but Coke was a Cecil man, with much, much more actual experience before the bar; and the Cecil's won out.

"It seems my rival hath won favored place with your niece," observed Coke.

"Aye," replied Cecil quietly, "they were together at Greenwich last night and all day at the Curtain."

"She seems to have collected one trophy of the hunt," jibed Coke, "or was it the chase?"

"If it's her finger ye mean, yes," replied Cecil, "but if it's yon barrister, without titles, lands or money -- and he thinketh to marry

a Cecil!"

"He liveth well -- with all the appurtenances of a gentleman -- servants, secretaries, excellent wardrobe, the latest carriage with the finest team of grays in town!" said Coke. "He disdaineth the practise of law, so there must be truth in it."

Coke was fishing for information which he was quite sure Cecil had but the latter ducked the question.

"How is this?" he asked.

"That Bacon is a gentleman pensioner of the Queen," Coke replied bluntly.

"Gentleman pensioner he might or might not be," evaded Cecil, "but certain it is he deriveth a great profit from the Plays."

"Is it a matter of record?" asked the lawyer.

"At present, the 'record' is in Mr. Bacon's ample means. He's even enlarging his rooms at the Inn!" Cecil allowed himself to be more forceful than was his wont. "But we'll set the record straight by putting the actor, Will Shagsbur, to the Question. Hast thou seen the latest, Richard III?"

"No," Coke shook his head rather regretfully, "Mrs. Coke holds Masqueing in very low esteem. . . "

"Well, there's treason in it. And if the writer of the Plays is faithful to Holinshed in this latest one they're trumpeting all over town. . . "

"What is that, m'Lord?" asked Coke.

"Richard II! If you knew your English history as well as you know English law, you'd know Richard II is the only king who ever gave up the throne for misgovernance. Canst thou imagine the utter folly of presenting such dangerous matter at present?"

Coke looked at Cecil in amaze, then down at the jewelled buckles on his shoes. The idea was new to him, an English king deposed for malfeasance? Instantly his keen lawyer's mind jumped at the legal aspects of the case, but lest Cecil take his silence awry he made proper reply.

"Her Majesty could scarce look upon it with pleasure, m'Lord."

"Aye, the Queen would have cause for alarm had she heard the rabble roar their approval this afternoon when Richard III suffered defeat at the hands of Richmond."

Beeston came up to them as they sat, close enough to the music to appear to be listening and also close enough to have their words effectively muffled to any casual passer-by.

"Excellent Burgundy, this," he smacked his lips over a sip and held the delicate glass up to the light. "You're not drinking, m'Lord? Mr. Coke?"

"Dont mind if I do," the attorney-general replied drily.

Cecil nodded and Beeston gestured to a watchful servant, with a characteristic limp wrist not lost on Coke. The attorney-general was all man but he covered well his distaste for the effiminate dandies with which Cecil surrounded himself. London of the late sixteenth century was too worldly wise to be shocked by homosexuality, but at least it wasn't as blatantly displayed here as at the French court or in that cesspool of sodomy, Rome.

Evil himself, Cecil could only speculate on what evil designs on the house of Cecil were going through the mind of Bacon, out there, dancing so gracefully with his niece.

"Didst discover Bacon's man, Percy, at the Curtain?" he asked Beeston.

"Aye, m'Lord, his purse was heavy with gold when he left."

"Did he make straight for Gray's Inn?"

"Not quite, m'Lord. By way of Paul's to read playbills and wet his throat," replied Beeston and he drank thirstily to wet his own.

Coke looked at Cecil. Cecil smiled knowingly in return. How he would have liked to tell Coke <u>all</u> he knew about the Queen's son, but that would have to be carefully doled out bit by bit as the lawyer became more and more involved in the toils of the Cecil clan.

"Shut down every damned playhouse in England, I say!" Coke broke in on Cecil's revery with a blunt solution. A revengeful surge in Cecil's own breast told him how much he liked the idea. But he was too well trained in self-control to reveal any of this even to Coke.

"Wouldst thou stop her Majesty's pleasure?" Cecil reminded him. "Her Christmas revels must have their Masques, and those the best plays of the season! Wouldn't it be simpler to apprehend the wretch who touched pen to paper?"

"Aye, your Lordship," agreed Coke quickly, after all, his number one client had spoken, "but how to sm oke the rascal out? There's the rub."

"Methinks 'twould be well to discover her Majesty's thought on it. Is it wise to publicly portray the immolation of an English king at this time? I think not. For the Queen to think otherwise. . . "

Cecil waved his long, crooked fingers in a revealing gesture of dismissal. He had made it his business to shape the Queen's thoughts

For thirty years now he had been practicing and succeeded better than any man. It was simple, play to her insatiable vanity and her burning, unquenchable need for sex. Last night he had thought to have in Lady Hatton an especially useful lever for manipulating the Queen as needed, but Lillibet's "badge of honor", that broken finger, showed that the young beauty's compliance in venery would not easily be obtained. Of course, the supply of beautiful, tender virgins, from parents ambitious for place and influence at Court, was endless!

But Cecil could not let slip such an opportunity to have a bed-companion for Elizabeth in this close relative! Beyond that, there would be the delicious vengeance of denying her to his feared and hated rival, Francis Bacon. The successful conclusion of the lawyer's suit for his niece's hand would never do. Coke and Beeston had been waiting for him to finish that last sentence. So he came out with this veiled threat, as he watched Lillibet and Francis conclude their dance and head for the sideboard for a refreshing sip of wine.

"The fine feathers of these Shake-scenes have wanted clipping for this many a-day."

"Aye," agreed Coke eagerly, "His Honor, the Lord Mayor of London is wi' ye in that, your Lordship. The trade leaving the City is the despair o' the merchants."

"Mr. Coke," Cecil nodded as though in sympathy with the plight of the Lord Mayor and the merchants, "dance ye a measure with my niece and drop a hint that I would have a word with her later."

Coke was ready enough to tread more than a measure with this hostess and moved confidently toward the knot of admirers around her. Lillibet was trying to choose between De Burgh and Southampton as the music struck up again. Coke solved the problem for her by boldly claiming her good hand and whirling her triumphantly away on the polished and shining floor.

In one of those quirks of ballroom fate which left him without a partner, Francis was glad enough to find a comfortable chair and rest that gout-twinged foot. Not that it hindered him from making a graceful and handsome compliment to Lillibet, but away from the exalting aura of her beauty he was suddenly aware of this physical limitation. The young Earl of Southampton was partnerless, too, and at Francis' gestured invitation he found a richly tapestried, spindle-legged excuse for a chair. Before a ready servant could help he drew it close and sat down, waving the fellow away with a "bring some wine, claret."

This truly beautiful young man knew the secret of the brothers, their royal parentage, and it would have been difficult to say which he admired the most. He looked up to Francis Bacon as an elder brother to whom he could always go for sage advice and counsel; but he was doggedly devoted to the fiery Earl of Essex.

"Hast news of the Earl?" asked Francis

"They're in the Channel, we pray," he replied. "God rest it be a speedy voyage to Spain."

"And a most successful one," added Francis.

The servant arrived with the claret and they drank to the success of the Earl's latest mad enterprise.

"- - though I fear for that tender affection her Majesty holds for him, should he come back empty handed." Francis looked doubtfully into his wine, as though it returned gloomy visions of the coming raid on Coruna and Spanish shipping.

"Hah!" exulted Southampton, "the Earl hath the Queen's heart in the palm of his hand. He'll return a hero." He cocked a quizzical eye at Francis. "Your own venture in 'hearts' goeth well, I understand." Shall we drink to <u>your</u> Elizabeth?"

As though suiting her action to the young Earl's word, Lillibet swept by and beamed a dazzling smile at them. It would have melted a stone. They raised their glasses in reply with a "cheers" and drained them at a gulp. The servant took them away for a refill.

Francis was eager for news of Cecil's whereabouts that day, if he had seen the Queen. The Bacons had helped Essex set up an information system equal to that of the Cecils'. This gave Elizabethan politics a fair two-party system of liberals and conservatives -- as fair as could be expected under a dissolute old despot like Elizabeth. The Cecils and their faction, conservative, had been in control for years now, but with the organizing genius of Francis and Anthony Bacon behind him, Essex had sustained such a drive for power that the Cecils had been forced to come to terms with him.

When Cecil had proposed a dinner between himself, Raleigh and Essex in April, Essex had accepted with alacrity. It had been a very amiable gathering at Essex house between the three. One result was that Raleigh was restored to the good graces of the Queen and made Captain of the Guard again. Another result, the one which helped lead to the recent break between the two brothers, was that the famous and too-friendly dinner blunted the Earl's purpose, to get the Cecils out of favor, and power, and place himself and Francis next to the throne.

Essex interpreted Robert Cecil's conciliatory attitude as a sign of weakness which would lead eventually to his and his father's downfall. Francis had interpreted it as an astute move by Cecil to allay the Earl's suspicions as to his true purpose. Cecil's purpose was and always would be to destroy Elizabeth's two sons and remove them forever as a threat to the favored Cecils and their privileged position at the heart of English government.

Part of the information network set up by the Bacons for Essex was in Elizabeth's entourage, to keep them informed if possible on her thoughts and actions at whichever of her innumerable palaces she might

be. If one of the Earl's noble followers could bed regularly a beautiful young lady-in-waiting -- who was also bedding with the Queen -- he was in a fair position to gain valuable tips on the monarch's moods and intentions. Essex set the example for this kind of espionage when he had his notorious affairs at Court, and even more so when he became intimate with the Queen herself! Young Southampton was enthusiastically following in his idol's footsteps, insofar as he was able.

"Tony tells me you were at Greenwich today."

"Aye," replied Southampton quietly, "to while a few moments with fairest Diane, lovely creature. Your cousin had her Majesty's ear for some words about London playhouses."

The servant returned with Claret for them. Bacon looked quizzically at Southampton. The young man shrugged and took an appreciative sip.

"Nothing really. Her Grace dismissed him rather abruptly. It doesn't appear that Mr. C obtained what he wanted. Whatever it was."

Francis leaned back relieved, somehow, and savored the liquor in the delicate little goblet in his hand. Lillibet and Coke came by again, again the dazzling smile.

"By Jove, man, you've fair swept the lass off her feet!" Southampton looked sharply at Bacon. "You both were at Greenwich last night. Didst have anything to do with that finger?"

Francis raised his hand in protest, "M'Lord, I'm not given to breaking ladies' fingers -- but thou knowest one who does."

"You mean -- " the young man's brows went up in astonishment.

"Her Majesty," replied Francis quietly but firmly. "Surely thou must have heard somewhat of it from thy fairest Diane?"

"Aye, but I couldn't believe it!" blurted Southampton. "Legend hath it that the Queen beds only virgins!"

"Virgin she is," replied Francis, "to the Queen. Else why that bandaged finger? I took her to Dr. Bright myself, early this morning."

"Mother of God," breathed Southampton. "So that's why you two were at the Curtain all day. I could scarce believe the tale when I heard it."

"Our espionage net is still in good repair it seems, m'Lord," observed Francis.

"Aye, Mr. Bacon," he replied, "and Richard II be as successful in revealing the masque of treason as Richard III, we'll ha' need of it."

"Thou knowest the deposition scene is in? Tilney approved my

manuscript entire. The rehearsal of Richard giving up his crown to Bolingbroke went well. Burbage was never better."

"Oh, that it were the morrow already," exulted the young Lord, "and her Grace were seeing the masque of treason torn away for all to see. Richard II! All success to him and our noble goal!"

The two clinked their glasses and toasted the success of Richard II. For all any observer might have suspected, they were drinking to the passing parade of beauty. As it was coming to a temporary stop with the end of that dance, they deposited their unfinished drinks with a servant and headed for the floor to claim their partners for the next, Southampton with Lillibet and Bacon with Lady Essex.

Edward Coke gravitated, not too hastily, back to his mentor with the information that Lady Hatton would indeed confer privately with her uncle later in the evening. He also suggested to Cecil that action on the closing of the Playhouses could very well be initiated by the Lord Mayor of London.

"His Honor is already on record as opposing this excessive and wasteful Masquing, m'Lord," said Coke. "Let the anger of the mob fall on him and the City whilst her Majesty's government benefits from this decisive blow at treason."

"Her Grace may call a meeting of the Privy Council on the morrow, to consider a date for Parliament," mused Cecil. "Couldst arrange to have His Honor the Mayor plead an appearance before her, with a resolution demanding relief from these treasonous and outrageous performances?"

"Aye, m'Lord, it shall be done. His Honor and the Queen's Attorney General have enjoyed friendly and close relations in the past."

When at last Lady Hatton had her fill of dancing and needed a breather, Francis would fain have taken her outside onto the garden terrace for air, but there was her uncle's request for a private consultation. As she led the limping, hunchbacked figure into the study and the door closed behind them, Francis somberly considered what new deviltry the monster might be up to.

For his part, Cecil was tired and went straight to the matters in hand. Lady Hatton was impatient to get back to the dancing and her guests. It had been a wonderful evening so far and she wanted it to continue.

"Hast enjoyed thyself, Uncle Robert?" she asked brightly.

"Aye, m'Lady," he replied in his quiet, toneless way, "But there would be more joy in my heart hadst thou been this night at Greenwich, in the pleasure of her Majesty's company."

Lady Hatton was aghast. Her good right hand instinctively covered that bandaged left finger as the shock of the evening before swept back

over her. They were standing. Cecil gestured to a chair and sat down himself, but she turned from him and walked nervously away.

"My dear uncle, this party had been planned a fortnight. I cannot believe you would expect me to be so rude to my guests."

"Her Majesty is the star, the sun in our firmament. All else revolves around her, looks to her for light. Burn this into thy heart and mind that it never be forgotten -- if thou wouldst maintain thy position and prosper in this kingdom!"

"Knowest thou why this finger is trussed up?" She walked over to him and thrust the bandage under his nose. "She did it! The Queen hath embarrassed me before the world! All London must be full of it. Oh-h-h-h-h-h-h-h-h-h, the agony of it. The shame!"

She turned away from him and paced. Cecil had scarce blinked an eye when she forced him to look at her "badge of honor".

"Need it have happened, my dear?"

"What meanest thou, need?" she exclaimed.

"Art thou such a stranger to dalliance that a night in the Queen's private chamber is abhorrent to you?" he smirked.

"Yes! Yes! Yes! If I must play at love, let it be with a man of my own choosing!"

"When the Queen chooseth a maid, take it not so lightly, my dear. Consider yourself fortunate if she breaketh no more than a finger."

"Is not honor a thousand times more to be desired than dalliance with the Queen, even?"

"Is it indeed," he protested mildly, and waved his hand at his luxurious surroundings. "Simple child. Thinkest thou honor obtained all this for Sir Christopher Hatton? Or the Bishops of Ely before him? Honor is for fools -- or for that landless barrister you've been seen with."

This sudden turn on her benefactor and lover stung her again.

"He is not penniless. He standeth well with the Queen!"

"He is without titles, honors, position. He hath no prospects and will have none. We'll see to that!" There was venom in his threat.

It was not lost on her. She stopped her pacing and looked at him as he continued. "If he is not penniless, how are his revenues derived? If Mr. Bacon hath honorable business or position, name it."

"He teacheth and practiceth law," she replied defiantly.

"Pah!" he dismissed that with a derisive wave of the hand. "The pittance derived from his practice supporteth not a tenth of his expenses, his fancy clothes, his servants, his secretaries, his suite of rooms at Gray's Inn. I say you, m'Lady, whence cometh all this gold?"

"'Tis said he is a gentleman pensioner of the Queen."

"Was, m'Lady, was! Until he opposed her Majesty's special subsidy in the Parliament of '94. Surely you received some inkling of the principal source of his income this very day!" Angered by her defense of his hated rival, Cecil decided to throw it directly at her. "Did he not boast to you of writing the Plays which even now, daily draw thousands to the Curtain and the Theatre? A vile, lewd trade if there ever was one."

"No," she shook her head and looked down at the floor, momentarily taken aback, "not -- not directly."

"Tell me, my dear," he mollified somewhat his own tone, "is this a fitting match for an honored member of the House of Cecil?" At her silence he answered for her. "I think not."

But there was fire in this member of the House of Cecil. She was mistress in her own palace and every inch a lady. Besides, her lover was under attack.

"Tell me, m'Lord, is it vile to portray the magnificent kings of England before London? So that even the unlettered masses know our glorious history at first hand? Methinks this is more useful entertaining than bear-baiting or carousing in the stews."

"Useful!" he snorted. "The rabble are useful only in their ignorance, to breed like rats, to slave, to do as they're told and beaten if they dont; if necessary, to fight for Queen and country and lie in some nameless grave in a foreign field."

"They can learn," she defied him. "They do learn, at Westminster School. They do learn from the history of England's kings acted out for them at the Curtain!"

"They learn treason!" he almosted shouted at her. "Idle men, thieves, rogues and rascals swarm the streets, waste their time in this Masqueing, seeing English kings portrayed as scoundrels, deposed, stripped of crown and power, murdered. The land is a tinder-box today. Drop these rebellious sparks and who knows what fires of revolution will start up."

"Surely you jest, uncle."

"No," he shook his head, "and once begun, who knows where it will end? Until every palace in London is a gutted ruin, including Hatton House."

This sudden personal angle to Francis Bacon's work at the Curtain

gave her pause for a moment. He stood up and moved close to her, looking in to her brown eyes.

"Put not your trust in this outlaw, this nobody -- who has nothing to lose and everything to gain from his mad schemes." Cecil's voice was triumphantly persuasive. "Your loyalty to the House of Cecil, to your Queen, will be well rewarded."

He raised his hand to give her left arm a friendly, reassuring pat, but she raised hers at the same moment because she didn't care to be touched by the monster. It was her injured hand and he accidentally struck it. The sudden pain brought her back to the degradation of the night before in the Queen's jewel box at Greenwich. She recoiled from him as though struck by a snake, clutching her hand against her bosom.

"I have had my reward from Queen Elizabeth!" she exclaimed and cried out as she rushed from the room, "I hope the old jade is deposed!"

No casual observer would have suspected the revengeful turmoil in Robert Cecil's breast as he limped slowly and deliberately from the place a calculated moment after his niece's departure. As Sir Hugh came up to him he suggested gently that their carriage be ordered up, then he limped his hunched figure over to the circle which had quickly formed around Lady Hatton. He spoke a pretty compliment to her and excused himself for leaving at this early hour. No hint of the fierce anger driving him to revenge himself on Bacon and the London stage showed itself in the casual banter he exchanged with the playwrite-lawyer and the others at Lillibet's feet. A slight but imperious gesture summoned Coke to accompany him to the door.

Francis couldn't help but wonder what new deviltry might be formin in that misshapen breast as he followed with questioning eyes Cecil's painful way with Coke across the polished floor of the huge hall and through the magnificently carved door. He paid his respects to half-brother, Sir Thomas, and Lillibet's guardian, who politely questioned his early departure from such happy company.

"Let them play," with an edge of spiteful bitterness in his voice his hand clutching Coke's arm. "We go where entertainment is more to my liking."

At this, Coke's eyebrows shot up and he looked quizzically at Sir Thomas. Lillibet's guardian merely shrugged his shoulders in reply but as Coke and Cecil turned to move out under the porte-cochere, the attorney-general caught a discomforting smirk on Sir Thomas' face. If that implication were not clear enough, the effiminate lilt to Sir Hugh Beeston's voice was as he came up. One good whiff of the delicate perfume coming from his dandified presence was enough for Edward Coke. He firmly removed Cecil's hand from his arm and transferred it to Beeston's. The lilt of an Irish jig came from the hall.

"God wi' ye, m'Lord, but I ha' this number with her Ladyship! Ye'll ha' the Lord Mayor's petition on the morrow, I assure you!" was

exclaimed over his shoulder as he hurried back into the light.

A wandering evening breeze carressed the Secretary of State with sensuous fragrance as his footmen ushered him into his coach by torch-light, with Beeston following close behind. It stirred an earthy fire in the two and spurred their passions toward the sadistic delights ahead.

As befitted the Queen's Privy Councilor, an armed escort road with him, half a dozen guards on horseback ahead, each bearing a flaming torch, and another half dozen behind. In those days London travellers had to light their own way when they rode or walked at night, else go in darkness, with rogues, thieves and rascals to be feared at every turn. Turn they did on Fleet Street toward the Strand, but not before Cecil ordered the carriage stopped at a still-open stall, to buy a bundle of fresh willow switches.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Opening of Richard II

The Pit at the Curtain was jammed with spectators. The great majority of them were followers of Lord Essex. The boxes and galleries were crowded too, and many of the nobility present favored the Earl and his liberal cause. The nation was in desperate need of a change of rulers. They were in a riotous mood as they easily absorbed the latest lesson taught by the greatest Teacher England and the Western world have ever known. With glittering phrases and scenes heavy with drama and tragedy, Francis Bacon was revealing for all to see how a corrupt and worthless monarch could be legally dispossessed of his throne. Today, almost four hundred years later, his Plays still so teach.

The sun of July 28th was warm on the players of Lord Chamberlain. The summer breeze stirred round the packed audience in the Pit and wafted their stink to the "quality" in the boxes. This went all unnoticed by the spectators, caught up in the hypnotic spell of the mighty tragedy before them. Yes, even including two inconspicuous in a private box at stage left, the unknown but suspected playwrite and Lady Hatton.

It was Act IV, Scene I. The action was laid in Westminster Hall. The Lords spiritual were on the right side of the hall and the empty throne. The Lords temporal were on the left, the Commons below. Bolingbroke, Henry IV-to-be, entered with regal pomp, surrounded by Lords, Bishops and attendants. Lillibet leaned close to Francis without taking her eyes off the stage.

"At last, a real king is to ascend the throne."

"Yes," Francis whispered, "first there had to be this business of charges against King Richard and his henchmen, even if there couldn't be a trial."

That out of the way, the Duke of York entered with attendants, bearing the sceptre, the rod of power.

> "Great Duke of Lancaster, I come to thee
> From plume-plucked Richard, who with willing soul
> Adopts thee heir, and his high sceptre yields
> To the possession of thy royal hands;
> Ascend his throne, descending now from him, --
> And long live Henry, of that name the Fourth!"

Henry Bolingbroke moved forward with sure step, grasped the proffered sceptre firmly and turned toward the throne.

"In God's name I'll ascend the regal throne."

Bishop Carlisle moved to lay a restraining hand on him, "Marry, God forbid! - - " But a roar from the crowd in the Pit drowned him out. Lillibet was on her feet, too, adding her protest to the chorus from below. It was moments before the Bishop could continue the long diatribe against Henry and this ominous violation of the divine right of kings.

"O, forfend it God,
That in a Christian climate, soul's refined
Should show so heinous, black, obscene a deed!"

There were a few sturdy and determined cheers at this time from the conservatives in the audience. One came from the box directly opposite, stage right, to the curtained cubicle occupied by Francis and Lady Hatton.

"'Tis the Earl of Shrewsbury, remember," cautioned Francis from his shadowed seat toward the back of the box. "Thinkst thou it wise to make such an open display?"

"I care not!" replied Lillibet with a rebellious toss of her head, but she sank back into her seat beside him. "'Tis a truly remarkable drama. Besides, corrupt monarchs should be warned."

As her right hand covered again that broken finger which was proof indeed of a corrupt monarch, Francis raised his finger to his lips to implore her silence. He watched the Bishop continue his condemnation of Henry.

"And if you crown him, let me prophesy, --
The blood of English shall manure the ground,
And future ages groan for this foul act;
Peace shall go sleep with Turks and infidels,
And in this seat of peace tumultuous wars
Shall kin with kin and kind with kind confound;"

Northumberland broke in upon him, saying, kindly but sternly, "Well have you argued, sir; and, for your pains, of capital treason we arrest you here." He turned to another of the Lords temporal beside him. "My Lord of Westminster, be it your charge to keep him safely till his day of trial." And then to the august gathering on the stage, "May it please you, lords, to grant the Commons' suit?"

This appeal to the lords to recognize the appeal of the Commons, the people's elected representatives, brought a burst of applause from the Earl's followers.

Inconspicuously and discreetly back in the Earl of Shrewsbury's box, Sir Robert Cecil drove a pen at lightning speed. The pages of notes grew thick as the revolutionary drama proceeded.

Then the actor, Henry Condell, as Bolingbroke, with kingly air

and a magnificent flourish of his newly acquired sceptre, spake out.

"Fetch hither Richard, that in common view he may surrender; so we shall proceed without suspicion."

With an "I will be his conduct," the Duke of York moved offstage quickly, and the new Henry IV, Bolingbroke, spoke again.

"Lords, you that are here under our arrest, procure your sureties for your days of answer. -- Little are we beholden to your love." He looked directly and sternly at the Bishop of Carlisle who had just prophesied ruin for his reign, "And little looked for at <u>your</u> helping hands."

There was a rustle at the back. The Duke of York returned with Richard II and attendants. One of them bore the crown on a cushion. Burbage, as Richard II, rolled out the mournful lines.

"Alack, why am I sent for to a king,
Before I have shook off the regal thoughts
Wherewith I have reigned? I hardly yet have
learned
To insinuate, to flatter, bow and bend my limbs:
To give sorrow leave awhile to tutor me
To this submission. Yet I well remember
The favors of these men; were they not mine?
Did they not some time cry, All hail to me?"

His lonely figure stood between the assembled Lords. He lifted his hand, shorn of the rings of power, and turned a half circle, pointing to all those who had hailed him as their ruler. The vast audience in Pit and galleries were hushed. A few of the Lords on stage shifted uneasily in sympathy and looked about them for signs of a reversion of feeling toward Richard. The stoney faces of the majority indicated their set wills. He continued his lament.

"So Judas did to Christ; but he, in twelve,
Found truth in all but one; I, in twelve thousand,
none.
God save the king! -- Will no man say amen?
Am I both priest and clerk? Well then, amen.
God save the king! although I be not he;
And yet, amen, if heaven do think him me. --
To do what service am I sent for hither?"

Richard looked haplessly around and York stepped forward.

"To do that office of thine own good will
Which tired majesty did make thee offer,--
The resignation of thy state and crown
To Henry Bolingbroke."

There was an awkward silence while the pressure of the assembled audience, on stage and off, forced Richard to do what he would not do

-- except those who were highly disturbed by this procedure.

"There is no precedent in all English history for this kind of ceremony," the Earl of Shrewsbury turned to Cecil back in the shadows. "Is it not dangerous in these troubled times to portray such matter baldly before the mob?"

Before Cecil could reply, Richard spoke out on the stage, "Give me the crown," and gestured to the mobleman carrying the circlet of gold and jewels.

As it was handed to him a roar of approval welled from the Pit. The Essex men and women could scarce control their excitement. They didn't want to. Richard strode to the throne. Without kneeling he extended his right hand.

"Here, cousin, seize the crown; on this side my hand and on that side yours."

Without a word in reply Bolingbroke reached out his right hand and grasped it, but Richard would not let go, and said:

"Now is this golden crown like a deep well
That owes two buckets, filling one another;
The emptier ever dancing in the air,
The other down, unseen, and full of water;
That bucket down and full of tears am I,
Drinking my griefs, whilst you mount on high."

"I thought you had been willing to resign," replied Bolingbroke as he clutched that precious symbol of rulership, holding it steady between them. They waited, eye to eye, for the Pit to quiet down but there was a steady murmur from there and the galleries that would not still at this audacious, heady drama.

"Dont give it up!" almost shouted Shrewsbury from his box. Back standing behind him, another voice echoed his command. It was Sir Hugh Beeston, Cecil's man. There were chairs there for his use but he was rather a little too sore in the behind to sit comfortably for long! The crowd would not quiet so Richard went on:

"My crown I am; but still my griefs are mine.
You may my glories and my state depose,
But not my griefs; still I am king of those."

"Part of your cares you give me with your crown.
Your cares set up do not pluck my cares down;
Your care is, gain of care, by new care won.
The cares I give, I have, though given away;
They tend the crown, yet still with me they stay."

Bolingbroke impatiently tugged at the crown between them. "Are you contented to resign the crown?" he demanded, and tugged again.

"Ay, no -- " Richard said regretfully, but finally dropped his hand to his side and turned away.

"Treason, damnable treason!" muttered Cecil in his box and continued his notes.

"Cant this treachery be stopped?" said Shrewsbury turning to Cecil again.

"Today? No," replied Cecil. "Tomorrow? Yes! And I ha' my way with her Majesty, these mangy scene-shakers will ne'er tread these boards again!"

Onstage, Burbage as Richard II turned to the multitude. He would not watch as Henry tried the crown on his own head, and settled it firmly there while Richard spoke again:

" -- no ay; for I must nothing be.
Therefore no no, for I resign thee.
Now mark me how I will undo myself: --
I give this heavy weight from off my head,
And this unwieldly sceptre from my hand,
The pride of kingly sway from my heart;
With mine own tears I wash away my balm,
With mine own hands I give away my crown,
With mine own tongue deny my sacred state,
With mine own breath release all duty's rites:
All pomp and majesty I do forswear;
My manors, rents, revenues I forego;
My acts, decrees, and statutes I deny;
God pardon all oaths that are broke to me!
Make me, that nothing have, with nothing grieved,
And thou with all pleased, that has all achieved!
Long mayst thou live in Richard's seat to sit.
And soon lie Richard in an earthy pit!
God save King Henry, unkinged Richard says,
And send him many years of sunshined days! -- "

There was a roar from the Pit as though, in truth, Richard had crowned a new king for England right there on the stage, to bring new hope to an unhappy land, depressed by a despot far, far too long in power and steeped in corruption. The Lords temporal and the Lords spiritual tossed their hats and cheered like any commoner. Hats, purses and other articles were tossed in the air by the audience. Some flew up on the stage to add to the gaiety of the occasion. Richard looked to the Lords temporal and spoke again when the noise had subsided.

"What more remains?"

"No more but that you read these accusations," replied Northumberland hastily, "and these grievous crimes commited by your followers against the state and profit of this land; that, by confessing them, the souls of men may deem that you are worthily deposed."

Northumberland thrust the list of Richard's crimes into the reluctant hands of the deposed king. He deigned not to look at it, but with penetrating and reproachful gaze into the Lord's eyes, questioned him:

"Must I do? and must I ravel out
My weaved up follies? Gentle Northumberland,
If thy offence were upon record,
Would it not shame then in so fair a troop
To read a lecture to them?"

He turned slowly, with kingly gesture, catching the eye of everyone present. He shook the paper at them:

"If thou wouldst,
There shouldst thou find one heinous article --
Containing the deposing of a king,
And cracking the strong warrant of an oath, --
Marked with a blot, damned in the book of heaven: --
Nay, all of you that stand and look upon,
Whilst that my wretchedness doth bait myself, --
Though some of you, with Pilate, wash your hands,
Showing an outward pity; yet you Pilates
Have here delivered me to my sour cross,
And water cannot wash away your sin."

There was a murmur of sympathy from the conservatives, and a ripple of applause for this moving scene; it was well delivered. Northumberland addressed him more urgently, after a gesture of impatience from Bolingbroke, the crown now well settled upon his fair head.

"My lord, despatch; read o'er these articles!"

"Mine eyes are full of tears, I cannot see;
And yet salt water blinds them not so much
But they can see a sort of traitors here,
Nay, if I turn mine eyes upon myself
I find myself a traitor with the rest;
For I have given here my soul's consent
To undeck the pompous body of a king;
Make glory base, and sovereignty a slave;
Proud majesty a subject, state a peasant."

"My lord -- "broke in Northumberland, but Richard was not to be denied his last word; and up in his box, Francis Bacon, mind and emotions wrapped up in this tragedy, clutched Lillibet's good hand to his heart -- from whence the coming words of Richard had been wrung like blood, drop by drop.

"Tell it!" he muttered fiercely. "Tell it!" and as Richard continued, breathed the tell-tale words with him.

"No lord of mine, thou haught insulting man,
Nor no man's lord; I have no name, no title --
No, not that name was given me at the font, --

But 'tis usurped: -- alack the heavy day
That I have worn so many winters out,
And know not what name to call myself!
O that I were a mockery-king of snow,
Standing before the sun of Bolingbroke,
To melt myself away in water-drops! --
Good king, -- great king, -- and not greatly good, --
And if my word be sterling yet in England,
Let it command a mirror hither straight,
That it may show me what a face I have."

Bolingbroke, the new King, Henry IVth, issuing his first command as king, ordered that a mirror be fetched for Richard.

"Please, Francis,"

Lillibet tried in vain to release her hand from his grasp. Her struggle pulled his attention from the stage to her. The gleam of wild rebellion, anger, pain, frustration in his eyes was frightening in its intensity. Suddenly aware, he relaxed his grip on her slightly, raised the bruised flesh to his lips for one tender kiss, and dropped it with a covering laugh and an apology. If she had hoped for some explanatinn of his secret it was not forthcoming now.

There was another in the Theatre on whom the import of those lines was not lost. When Cecil heard those words, "I have no name, no title . . . and I know not what name to call myself," his racing pen poised for a moment at this public confession of his Queen's son.

"An' Robert Cecil ha' anything to say about it, ye'll go nameless to the grave!" he muttered.

Hearing the muttering Shrewsbury and Beeston looked at the Secretary of State questioningly but Cecil quieted them with a gesture; for on the stage, after looking at himself and delivering more reproachful lines, Richard shattered the mirror in a thousand pieces and Henry ordered him away to the Tower.

Another roar from the Pit stopped the action for minutes at this climax of the great drama of the deposition of an evil English king, as Francis Bacon taught his contemporaries that it had been done and could be done again if necessary, legally! This was the very central message of the play as he'd intended it. It had struck a resounding note in the hearts of the audience, that was obvious. The remaining scenes concerned themselves with Henry's consolidation of his position, a fine study in the handling of power, and the elimination of his enemies in the government including, finally, the assassinatinn of Richard. This bloody business caused Bolingbroke to close the play with these regretful, immortal rhymed couplets:

"Lords, I protest, my soul is full of woe,
That blood should sprinkle me to make me grow;
Come, mourn with me for that I do lament,
And put on sullen black incontinent.

I'll make a voyage to the Holy Land,
To wash this blood off from my guilty hand: --
March sadly after; grace my mourning here,
In weeping after this untimely bier."

As the curtain fell at the Curtain on the last act of the first performance of Richard II in London, July 28, 1597 cheers and applause drew the magnificent cast back for bow after bow. Francis applauded with all enthusiasm and Lillibet stood close beside him, waving her good right hand and cheering with the rest. Unnoticed in the excitement, across the way from them, two very unenthusiastic spectators prepared to leave their box. Cecil had already sent Beeston to order up their carriage with a "we make a hasty exit!"

"Her Majesty will hear of this," he said to Shrewsbury as he thrust notes, quill and ink in a despatch case and closed the lid with an emphatic snap.

"Wi' all haste indeed, Sir Robert," replied the Earl and he opened the box door into the still empty corridor outside. "After you."

Clutching his case of precious and incriminating notes under his arm, the Queen's Secretary of State lurched out and on his way to a hoped-for successful audience with her Majesty at Greenwich.

Two thousand spectators surged out of the Curtain after that first performance, little realizing that if Cecil had his way with the Queen, it would be the last, for several months. The majority of the audience headed toward the City. Had the Earl of Essex been there his followers would have gathered round him for a rousing session over the political implications of Richard II's deposition; nevertheless, the taverns on the road to the City were clamorous with their noise.

The Earl! The Earl! Yes, yes, the Earl! Essex would bring an end to hard times and put men back to work. Essex would reduce the price of corn an' he were the ruler of England! Yes, and Essex would conquer England's mortal enemy, Spain, turn the Catholic cause to shambles, and bring the King of Spain, Philip, to London in chains. Yes, yes, the latest rhymes from the mighty pen of Francis Bacon worked a potent spell in London that last week in July, 1597. Ere many hours were passed the results would be known to all.

Lillibet wanted to be home with her family or she and Francis might have joined Anthony Bacon, the Earl of Southampton, Penelope Rich, Lady Essex, Richard de Burgh and others at Charterhouse to toast the latest success of Lord Chamberlain's Players at the Curtain. After escorting her to her door at Hatton House he went on to his quarters at Gray's Inn. His planned program of study and writing in philosophy and drama was falling behind after the events of the past two days.

CHAPTER EIGHT

An Audience With The Queen

"She was perhaps the most singular being
That till this day this island did produce."

Francis Bacon's Cipher Story

England's aged monarch boasted that she was always available to her subjects, and so she was, in her way. True, she never left the little island kingdom in all her long years; and like all great organizers she gave attention to the smallest detail of national life.

In his cipher story, Bacon wrote about his mother, "She was not only wise in the laws of the country and of a high spirit in the business of the Crown; but was besides both little and mean, insomuch that she commonly restrainted the course and proceedings of her ministers and servants, for fear they would overtop and overshadow her."

At the time of this story in 1597, Elizabeth had nourished her vanity to enormous proportions. All England's successes were hers; all mistakes were attributed to the "drifts and reaches", to the "errors and sleepings" of her ministers and servants.

Opposition of any kind caused her to blaze and flame up in a hysterical frenzy which forced wise men of the empire "to either give no counsel in matters of state or else give it with great sluggishness and backwardness, framing their speech in so intangible a manner that it appears not plainly by their remarks what kind of principles they first advance."

There was only one way into the grace of Queen Elizabeth, "worship of her virtue, wisdom and person". It was only after an endless and nauseous extolling of her virtues that a supplicant would cautiously give the reason for his petition, in the vain hope that the Queen would hear him out without receiving from her in return a storm of abuse.

On this late afternoon of the first performance of Richard II, Elizabeth I was accessible to her people -- as she claimed -- and was entertaining and being entertained in her sumptuous palace by the river Thames there in Greenwich. She is surrounded by youth and beauty, who come at the command of this wilful old woman whether they like it or not. But the favor of the old despot had its compensations in pres-

tige or money, or power, or all three.

Night and day, week in and week out, year in and year out, there was always someone waiting to petition the Queen; usually dozens, sometimes hundreds, spending endless hours on the fringes of the court, patiently hoping for a hearing and miracle of miracles, an actual redress of grievances. When her pleasures and dalliances paled there was always the diversion of allowing some citizen to come forward with his plea. It could be entertaining. It would give Elizabeth a chance to revel in her limitless power -- by having the unfortunate beaten and thrown in jail, even murdered -- if it pleased her. It could also give her some idea of the temper of the times.

Here is the Earl of Northumberland with a fellow, clean enough and with enough education and good speech to have worked his way through and up the "chain of command" leading to the throne. Hat in hand he pitched himself on his knees. Listen to this supplication, typical of many heard by Francis Bacon during his countless hours at court where he, too, sought the grace of Her Grace.

"Most fortunate and fair queen, on whose head
Wisdom hath laid her crown and in whose hands
Justice hath left her ballance and her sword,
Vouchsafe to hear and judge a country controversy;
For there is as great equity in defending of
Poor men's onions as of rich men's lands;
And as you are she of whom Sybilla speaks,
The miracle of time and nature's glory,
Vouchsafe to pity this 'plaint of your poor beadsman.
I call myself indeed a chaperon of this gardener,
And I boast of the fortune that most
Luckily assigned me, the meanest of your
Assembled family, to defend this humble man."

There was a stir among the courtiers in the presence room. Elizabeth's eyes flicked quickly over the gorgeous throng to see her Secretary of State limping and lurching his way across the shiny floor. With him was the Earl of Shrewsbury. She returned her attention to her suppliant countryman. His clothes had no style, but good money had been spent on them.

"Seeing that your majesty hath that that
Baser souls, not knowing, cannot effect --
Sage, grave and wise counsel and
Complete felicity
I propose to say something without
Wandering into praises of so rare a queen.
For praise is the tribute of men;
Felicity the gift of God; but in order
To give the peculiar beauty and appropriate
Lustre to your highness, I should be such
A perfect orator or pleader as Cicero,
And not a prince or courtier; for if I
Should enter into your praises, whether

Moral or political I should fall into
Subjects requiring a richer vein of wit than
I have. Thus much I have said in a few words
According to my ability; but the truth is
That the only true commander of this lady
Is time, which, so long a course
As it has run, had produced nothing
In this sex like her for the administration
Either of civil affairs or in the perfection
Of the mould nature hath used in
Putting together the rarest thing of all."

Elizabeth was disposed to give ear to this fulsome praise of her her virtues, dignity and powers. The manyfold shortcomings and irritations of her kingdom were pushed into the background. Her enormous and insatiable vanity received the nourishment which it needed, daily, hourly.

"For if viewed indulgently her beauty
Is much like the accounts we find
In romances of the queen in the
Blessed Isles. The government of a woman
Has been a rare thing at all times,
Felicity in such a government a rarer thing
Yet this queen, because of her salutary
Counsels, is strong and fresh both
In the mouths and minds of men.
There are some times so barbarous and ignorant
That it is as easy a matter to govern men
As to drive a flock of sheep;
But the lot of this queen hath fallen
Upon times highly instructed and cultivated,
In which it is not possible to be eminent
And excellent without the greatest gifts of mind
And a singular composition of virtue."

This fellow was clean. He had good command of the Queen's English. His hair and beard were neatly trimmed, touched with grey, his body a little on the stout side. By all means she would hear him out.

"Nor must it be forgotten withal
What kind of people she has been
Called upon to rule over. Had she
Reigned over Palmyrenes or in an
Unwarlike and effiminate country,
Like Asia, the wonder would be less;
But the reputation of England for arms
And military powers being great,
The honour of keeping both our
Nation in full vigor of its
Warlike virtues and its fame
And honor in full, is the best inheritance
That this tabernacle of virtuous dignity
Was by God destined from birth for a kingdom.

Again the reigns of women are
Commonly obscured by marriage,
Their praises and actions passing to the
Credit of their husbands, -- whereas those
That continue unmarried have their glory entire
And proper to themselves. In her case
This is especially so, inasmuch as
She has no help to lean upon in
Her government except such as
She herself has provided; --
No own brother, no uncle, no kinsman
Of the royal family, to share her cares
And support her authority. But
I must run into the history
Of her life, but conclude my task."

The hunchback Cecil had by this lurched his way through the crowd. This was no great difficulty for the courtiers made way before him with alacrity, as though fearing his very touch. He tried to cut short the suppliant with a gesture but the queen waved him aside. And the abject subject before her, feeling he had given sufficient to sweeten her Majesty's disposition, now at last got to the business at hand.

"This poor man came to me full sore
Distressed through the grudge of
The youngest son of the honorable old man
(Whom God bless with as many years and
Virtues as there be of him conceived
Hopes and wishes) who lives
Some four miles hence well
Worthy of so honorable a place.
This young loach spares not the garden
Of this poor man, but on the contrary
With his beautiful violets and primroses
(Whose beauty shineth as the morning clear)
Hath made free, and from the
Very sowing of the seeds he doth
Devise calamity for the poor mole-catcher."

'Til now the poor man's knees had taken the unwonted pressure without complaint, but of a sudden that highly polished parquet floor was mighty hard. He moved them slightly and shifted from one to the other, but found that one part of the floor was as unyielding as another.

"I told him our princely sovereign was well
Lettered and discreet, and that by fate's
And Fortune's good aspect, she (in these
Unhappy times when the kingdom is
With intestine faction on
On account of religion laboring) was
Raised to set upon her kingly father's seat
And wear in honor England's kingly diadem;

To sway that massy sceptre and that sword
That awed the world in his triumphant hand,
And now in her's commands the enemy,
And with dishonor drives the daring foe
Back to his den, tired with
Successless arms, wearied with wars
By land and wrack by sea;
And that under her we live in safety
And she in honor reigns over us.
So may she long and ever may she do,
Untouched by traitorous or treacherous foe."

With his precious dispatch case clutched under one arm Cecil would have interrupted the interminable dialogue, but Northumberland was before him. Ever solicitous for his Queen, the Lord raised a protesting hand to the suppliant.

"Not so fast, sweet sir, soft, soft,
This miracle and queen of gems
Is not at the beck of every man who is
Overwrought by his neighbors, because
The cares of government ought to be
Distinguished from these viler sort of cases.
This should be referred to learned magistrates,
And not to the princess, when other things
Of greater weight to the state are left
For want of time to low and vulgar men.
Therefore, thou shouldst not have spoken on't."

With a slight acknowledgment to Northumberland for having interceded, Cecil inched forward, but that worthy Lord had only paused for breath.

"She is the blossom and grace of courtesy,
And (standing as she does, as a shield
And stronghold of defense against
The formidable and overbearing ambition
Of Spain), her reason's reach and
Honor's height have set the world at gaze,
For wonders such as she doth possess
Transcend remembrance's golden register
And recommend to time's eternity;
For sealed up in the treasure of her heart
That freed from Cupid's yoke by fate
Is peerless wisdom and majesty."

Ever mindful of the Queen's unslaked thirst for flattery, Northumberland was doing no better than the other fellow -- in carrying the business of the kingdom forward!

"Must we have this interminable preamble to trivia!" grumbled Cecil under his breath; but the stomach-turning flow of lies went on, now to the commoner, now to the Queen.

"Yet, would you have her judge this simple thing.
If you will consult her majesty, ask her
To help us, through the luster and glory
Of her noble mind, in escaping or defeating
The forces of the enemy of England's peace;
For matter of war is nowise wanting.
It is not to monks or closet penmen
That we are to look for guidance
In such a case, but to this memorable
Person among princes, she who is ever
Occupied in the study of the commonwealth's
Advancement, to improve our utility
As did the emperors of Graecia."

A chorus of approving murmurs came from the surrounding sycophants. Such empty praise of Elizabeth had been their daily and nightly diet for years. Northumberland droned on.

"And we know there hath not been since
Christ's time any king or temporal monarch
Who hath been so much a king
As this fortunate woman. --
Fortunate in her victory, for when
That Spanish fleet, got up with so much
Travail and ferment, came ploughing
Into our channels, by her forces
And her counsels combined she
Kept it under, and it never took
So much as a cock-boat at sea;
Never fired so much as a cottage on the land;
Never even touched the shore;
But was first beaten in a battle
And then dispersed and wasted
In a miserable flight, with many
Shipwrecks, while on the ground and
Territories of England conspicuous.
Peace was not only maintained by her,
But she sent naval expeditions both
To the low countries of France, to
Scotland, to Portugal and to harass
The courts of Spain; and dispatched
Fleets also to the Indies, some of which
Sailed around the globe."

There was no other way to win the Queen's favor but to stomach the stuff. The suppliant shifted uneasily on his bony knees -- he was more used to living on his feet! There was a slight ripple of applause from the crowd around the throne. Clutching his dispatch case under his arm, Cecil clapped his hands politely along with the rest at Northumberland's description of the ghastly failure of the Spanish Armada, and hoped this was the end; but there was more to come.

"A womanish people might well enough
Be governed by a woman, but that

Can be ruled over by a woman is indeed
A matter for the highest admiration."

Enthused by the music of his own discourse, Northumberland sawed the air with his right hand.

"Blessed be God;
That hath sent us such a gracious
Learned, valiant and stainless queen!
Beshrew me, but I do hold her higher
In intellectual matters than any king
Born in the past or present.
And for her gift of speech I call to mind what
Cornelius Tacitus saith of Augustus Caesar
That his style of speech was flowing and princelike;
And her own native and original notions
Are proof she doth strenuously and diligently
Revolve and revise the subject, and doth not
Take hold in a superficial way
Of any matter of consequence."

Forty years of this daily diet of flattery had made it part of the machinery of state. Of course it slowed down the business of government immeasurably. Learned, able men tactfully kept away from Court as much as possible. Preferring not to "row against the stream". This made room for fools and mountebanks, scoundrels like Cecil who could make great "pretense of just deliberation and decision". Among this prize collection of jackstraws Elizabeth did indeed stand out like a giant of intellect and power. So, while her kingdom was plagued on every side by real troubles that went unsolved, she graciously listened to this man's complaint and ordered that it be looked into!

Cecil caught her eye, finally, and with a wave of dismissal she grasped her ever-present staff and rose. The surrounding courtiers and ladies-in-waiting bowed, knelt in waves, and England's greatest queen headed for her privy chamber. Shrewsbury stayed behind. Cecil staggered and limped along discreetly behind her. What a pair they made, the one a perfect compliment to the other.

"My fool," Elizabeth sometimes playfully called him, but if the truth were known it was the other way around! Once in the privy chamber Cecil asked that they be quite alone. Her majesty reluctantly dismissed her ladies.

"Now what is this that calleth for such secrecy and cannot await the Council meeting?" She asked, somewhat irked but genuinely curious. Cecil was not one to dilly-dally over trifles.

"Hath your Majesty been informed of the latest play of M'Lord Chamberlain's company?"

"Only that it was performed -- and excellently -- this very afternoon at the Curtain. My ladies have it that Master Burbage made a

most regal Richard II. Methinks it would entertain us well at Christmastide."

"But Richard II was deposed, yuu Majesty," replied Cecil slowly and deliberately, "and the Groundlings, the followers of the Earl, clapped up a storm of approval."

"Tut, man, would you have the Lord Chamberlain's men re-write history?" Elizabeth smiled indulgently at him. "'Tis well known that Richard II, even though a true English king, in many ways, lacked those very virtues which have kept me successfully at my post this many a year."

She had been leaning on her steel crutch, standing, expecting this interview to be of short duration. Now she abruptly sat down with a sigh, as though the prospect of forty years on tne throne was suddenly too much even for her. Cecil would have gone to his knees but she waved him to a seat nearby. This quasi-approval of the subject matter encouraged him to get more to the heart of the matter.

"If it please your Grace, the peace and honor of your kingdom are sore threatened by matter most treasonous. The tranquility of your Majesty's subjects is in great danger of incitement to rebellion when the deposition of one of your illustrious forebears is made common entertainment for the rabble."

"Pah!" she snorted in disgust at him. "Methinks thou art a pick-thank old fool to jibe at a bunch of mangy scene-shakers. Thou art still concerned over Richard III."

"Your Majesty," he pleaded, "in this new play, the latest at the Curtain, the dethronement of Richard II is now portrayed for all to see. Your Majesty's faithful subjects have need for entertainment, i' faith, but in times like these should they be reminded that kings can be deposed for misgovernance? That the throne can be taken by any usurper who dares lay hand on sword? And his crown given guarantee by the Lords Spiritual, the Lords Temporal, the Commons and the rabble?"

With a wave of the hand she stopped him without reply. Yes, Richard II's maladministration had lost the kingdom to Bolingbroke and the fickle people had quickly forgotten him in their new hero. Could this possibly happen to her, Elizabeth the Great?

"Who writeth these Masques for Lord Chamberlain?" she asked abruptly.

"These plays were put abroad upon the stage in the name of Marlow, a woe-begone, sullen fellow. Four years ago he engaged in a quarrel with one, Archer, a servant, a wanton, ending in a bloody, hand-to-hand fight, in which he was slain. The point of Marlow's own sword struck against his head and eye, making fearful wounds."

"Had we not a performance of Marlow's Tamburlaine one Christmastide?" asked the Queen.

"Aye," your Majesty, that we did."

"And wasn't Marlow under a cloud of suspicion, mouthing atheistical villanies? He should have been burned alive at Smithfield for the sin he committed."

She looked spiteful enough to have driven the sword into Marlow herself, or to have taken delight in setting torch to his execution pyre at Smithfield.

"What transpired at the Curtain, on with it, man."

"When King Richard fell a corpse at Pomfret, under uncounted blows, the Earl's followers make a most fearful noise; again and again it broke forth; it seemed they would never stop. The play shows a victory of the rebels over an annointed tyrant; and by this pipe he hath blown the flame of rebellion almost into an open war! The record is here!"

Cecil, for him, showed about as much disturbance as he ever allowed himself. He opened the desptach case and pulled out his notes. There was no doubting the sincerity of his expostulations.

"With Marlow gone, who now writeth for the Chamberlain's men?"

"A surly fellow from the West, named Shak'stpur, doth append his name to their plays. They are well known and have made the most holy matters of religion, which all good men hold in sincere respect, subject for laughter; their aim being, it is supposed, to thus poison the minds of the still discordant, wavering multitude. They mean in this covert way to make a rising and flood this fair land with blood, so that not only their bodies but their souls might be damned."

"Hath he singled out any one person?"

"Aye, your Grace, it is plain in the play that my Lord the Earl of Essex is young Harry Monmouth, Prince of Wales, the Duke of Monmouth's son."

"The knave, the horson knave," the Queen swore savagely. There would <u>never</u> be a Prince of Wales around longing for <u>her</u> throne! "Is it likely some country bumpkin could entertain all London with matter of such worth?"

"Tis said, your Grace, that Marlow and Shaksbeer never writ a word of them. It is plain that he is stuffing our ears with false reports and lies this many a year. He is a poor, dull, ill-spirited, greedy creature and but a veil for someone else, who had blown up the flame of rebellion almost in a war against your Grace as a royal tyrant."

"Probably some young hellion up from Oxford, idling around the Inns of Court," she observed, "who had best be bearing arms against the Spaniard -- or there wont be any Inns of Court, or Masquing, or London!

Knowest thou anyone who hath the truth of this Shak'stpur?"

"I have a suspicion that my kinsman's servant, young Harry Percy, is the man to whom Shakspeer gives every night the half of what he took through the day at the gate. Many rumors are on the tongues of men that my cousin, Francis, hath prepared not only the Contention between York and Lancaster and King John and this play, Richard II, but other plays which are put forth at first under the name of Morelow and now go abroad as prepared by Shagsburr."

With the naming of her son, Francis, the Queen was furious and showed it.

"This thing must stop!" she shouted at him. "Between you and your crafty old father with your smooth tongues, you are stuffing my ears with continual lies and false reports this many a year! There's no more treason in the honorable son of Sir Nicholas Bacon than there is in you!" Her lips scorned him in utter disgust, trembling with indignation she reviled him. "You knave! You Jew! To stoop so low, in this underhanded way. You push too far little man. If thou canst not prove Master Francis Bacon wrote the Plays, thou losest thy office. To think that Shagsbeer, that woeful, hateful, fat creature should be a mask for the brilliant son of Sir Nicholas Bacon. I pronounce this story the strangest tale in the world; it is not to be believed. It is a lot of lies."

She had risen to stump back and forth while Cecil went promptly to his knees. Her anger was such at this point she struck him across the face with her fan. Fortunate for him she didn't strike him with her steel crutch! But Cecil was not to be denied and he held the trump card.

"Shall your Grace allow the playing of Richard II to continue then?"

"Treason must stop, and traitors punished!" she shouted. Then in the face of the fact that the problem had not been solved, an icy calm prevailed where a moment before all had been fire. "Prove that Mr. Bacon wrote the Plays and he'll be executed. But take care no word of this spreads abroad until the Stratford clown is in hand. If need be, put him to the Question. Haste!"

She even helped him to his feet and as he bowed himself out of the Presence she called after him.

"My Lord of Shrewsbury hath a close tongue in his head. Let him Catch the knave. Knowest thou any one who hath the truth of this Shakespur?"

"Aye, your Majesty," he replied from the door, "the Bishop of Worcester, and he be in London this even."

"Call him here, before the Council. We'll put the Question to Mr. Shaksburr before Richard II plays again, or <u>he</u> wont play again!"

The old despot could move swiftly when she had a mind and Robert Cecil knew her mind when he bowed out of the Presence to set the machinery of state in motion. The Earl of Shrewsbury was instructed to take a troop of men-at-arms to the Curtain in Shoreditch to fetch one Will Shagsbeer, actor and manager. Pages were despatched to inform members of the Privy Council, to assemble at the Palace in Greenwich earlier than planned, "at the Queen's pleasure", which meant immediately.

Just to make sure of his quarry, Shrewsbury divided his men into two companies. One was sent to the Theatre in case Will was there. The other accompanied him to the Curtain. It was dark when the troop marched up from the City. London was not asleep and news of the passage of the Queen's men spread swiftly ahead of them. But where were they going? What was afoot?

The followers of the Earl of Essex were still roistering in taverns and inns along Bishopsgate and Shoreditch. But suddenly the big words of rebellion seemed empty and futile in the presence of the armed might of the realm. Quickly sober, ale tankards neglected, men crowded out of the tavern across Holy Well Lane from the Curtain. Lighted torches were seen at the upper level windows now as the soldiers ransacked the building. A terrified flunkey came running out, dodged through the crowd toward the shelter of the tavern. One man followed him inside. It was Umfreville, the Earl of Southampton's man.

"Hold, my good man, why runnest thou from yonder Curtain?" he asked, not too loudly, as he took hold of the man's shoulder.

There was fear in the man's eyes, fear and defiance, enough to want to make him wrench away and begone. Undecided, he said nothing as he freed his shoulder from Umfreville's grasp.

"Fear nothing," said Umfreville. "I'm your friend -- or I could be an' you tell me for whom the search goeth forward there," he nodded toward the Curtain. "It cant be for you!"

"Aye, sir, if I tell 'e, will 'e lemme go? 'Tis the actor, Will Shagsburr -- treason, they said, treason."

While Umfreville's mind was digesting this shocking information, the flunky moved quietly away from him and through a door leading to the back of the building. But Southampton's man had all the information he needed. He drained the last of the ale from his tankard, jammed a coin in the restraining hand of the waitress, chucked her under the chin, and hurried outside to his horse. He must get word of this to his master. He mounted quickly and raced off into the night, to Charterhouse, only a mile or so away, down Holywell Row, through Finsbury, along Chiswell and Barbican to Aldersgate, with occasional gleams of light to show the way he knew so well, then Charterhouse street itself and into the Inn yard. He tossed the reins to a yardboy and walked, not too quickly, into the tap room. Better to give the appearance of an unslaked thirst, than give himself and his master's cause away.

"My master, the Earl, and his guests?" he asked of Chillingsworth when he found him.

"The Armada Room," replied the busy host, with a gesture of his head down a dark hall. "'Ere, boy, show this gentleman to the Earl of Southampton and 'is party."

Umfreville thought better than to break in on the party with his disturbing news so he tipped the bus boy to call his master out into the comparative privacy of the corridor and "most urgent!"

A burst of laughter, song and the clink of glasses swept over Umfreville when the boy opened the door on the glittering company inside. The young Earl was soon beside him, though not too happy at being disturbed.

"M'Lord, troubles afoot! Real trouble! The Curtain's o'errun with troops!" The man's low-voiced urgency stopped Southampton's protesting hand in mid-air. "They're after the actor Will Shak'stpur for treason!"

Even though the Essex faction had suspected something like this would eventually happen, the positive threat of it now staggered the young Earl and he leaned against the wall. This momentary weakness wasn't too obvious as it helped make way for a bus boy with a huge tray of dirty dishes from some other part of the inn.

"Oh, if the Earl were only here, he'd know what to do!"

This was almost a cry for help as Southampton wished for the presence of his hero, Essex.

"Beggin' your pardon, m'Lord, isn't the Earl safer at sea than 'ere?"

"Aye, that he is," replied Southampton as he passed his slender white hand across his forehead. "An' this means what I <u>think</u> it means, we'd all best be on the sea, away from here! Go fetch Mr. Bacon."

The Earl nodded toward the door of the Armada Room but even as Umfreville moved to open it the Earl was beside him to move on in, his own hand on the knob. The merriment subsided not a whit, for which the Earl was grateful, and finally catching Bacon's eye, he urgently beckoned him out into the hall. Anthony's reaction to the news was immediate and decisive.

"Francis must be out of London tonight! Now!" emphasizing his determination with set jaw he turned, went back into the Armada Room and was back immediately with hat and cloak. The Earl was still standing there, wringing his hands. Anthony Bacon unceremoniously grasped him by the shoulder.

"Shagsburr must be out of the country. If Topcliffe ever puts him to the Question he'll spill his guts! Move, m'Lord, as you've never

moved before! Get thou someone up to Stratford and tell that clown to head for the Channel!"

Clapping his hat on his head, Anthony started down the corridor.

"Suppose he wont go?" wailed Southampton.

"Offer him a thousand pounds," exclaimed Anthony over his shoulder, "the miser 'll do anything for gold!" and he hurried on out.

There was only a brief delay up front as he assured Chillingsworth that the Earl would settle the whole bill. Outside, instead of waiting for the hostler to bring up his mount, he hurried to the yard with the man, tipped him, mounted right there and thundered out into the night as though the devil himself were after him.

The way was well lighted along Charterhouse. Guttering torches in front of the Smithfield markets showed the way. But the speed he might have made because of the light was hindered by the traffic, all the way to Holborn Circus and beyond. Gray's Inn Road was another story and he galloped his big black up that dearly familiar street, even in the darkness, gave the beast's big rump a grateful slap as he dismounted, drew the reins hastily through the hitching ring, hurried up and pounded on his "brother's" door. Harry Percy let him in.

"Be the devil chasin' you, sir?" he asked as Anthony moved unceremoniously past him.

"Aye," he replied over his shoulder, as he moved quickly on into Francis' study, "the devil and the Queen's men!"

The lawyer was deep in ciphers, committing his personal history to his next-to-be-published work. Anthony's abrupt arrival was a shock that wrenched Francis reluctantly but forcefully back to reality from the secret mental world of the cryptographer. It was a consuming hobby which helped save his sanity.

The two exchanged a knowing look which spoke volumes. Tony moved over to the sideboard, helped himself to wine, and sat down with a sigh.

"It hath come then?" asked Francis quietly.

"Aye, good brother, it hath come. The Curtain's over run with troops."

"Why?"

"I suppose that devil Cecil's got the Queen to go after Shagsbeer for treason."

"They're sore wounded after only one performance of Richard II," said Francis with a grim smile, and he carefully and meticulously gathered up his cryptography materials.

"Aye," replied Anthony even more grimly, "an' it's wounded ye'll be -- and deep -- if ye dont get out of here."

"Her Majesty's called her Council. I had a suspicion the Play might be the real cause."

"And the playwrite!" added Anthony.

"D'ye think they'll be coming after me?" Francis turned to a gorgeous little cherrywood cabinet behind him and tucked the papers carefully away in a secret compartment.

"Would ye be waiting to welcome them, good brother?" Anthony tossed off the rest of his wine and set the glass down decisively. "Ye must go, now!"

Francis carefully locked the little cabinet and tucked the key in his purse. He got up and went to the sideboard for a stiff shot of wine himself.

"Jones!" Anthony called, and when the man soon appeared, "get your master's boots, and a cloak. Hurry now, we've a full night ahead." And when Jones had left the room, "Ye'll have to leave England, 'til this blows over; and so will your nom de plume. Thank God he's at Stratford!"

"They'll follow him there," observed Francis glumly. His speech was little but his mind was racing over all the ramifications, possibilities and alternatives to this crisis in his affairs. "The Cinque ports will be closed to us."

"Aye," replied Anthony, "but there are others. Harry and I'll take care of the Stratford clown, one way or another. He'll save his hide for gold, and it'll stop his tongue to boot." Harry!"

"Whose gold? Southampton's?" asked Francis, as Jones returned with riding apparel. "Will you bring up my horse?"

"I'll do it, sir," said Harry as he entered the room.

"Dont bother," said Anthony to him, and to Francis, "Take Cerberus."

"That black monster?" protested Francis.

"Man, ye'll need a horse for tonight's ride -- not that spindle-legged Italian fancy ye're stabling now!" Anthony was showing signs of pressure as his voice rose. "That Channel's a long way away."

"By way of Gorhambury it's even further," replied Francis.

"Gorhambury!" exploded Anthony. "You idiot! That's the first place they'll search!"

"The second place," Francis reminded him quietly. "This is the first."

The second boot was finally on and he stood to stamp his feet firmly in place. He didn't like the cloak and hat Jones had brought out, so he went to his dressing room to make the selection himself.

"Begging your pardon, sir, do you mind telling me what this is all about?" asked Harry Percy of Anthony Bacon.

Bacon then told him that the Curtain, which he had left only earlier that evening, was now over run with troops and the search was on for the author of Richard II.

"Fortunate it is, sir, that Will's at Stratford," breathed Percy thankfully.

"Aye," replied Anthony, "but if he's too sick to ride we're in it for fair. Once her Majesty gets her hands on him he'll tell all, wont he?"

"That 'e will, sir. That 'e will." Percy shook his head. "Will hath no endurance."

"Unless we can get to Stratford first and get him out of the country!"

"He'll demand his price, sir. I know him." replied Harry.

"Give him his price, the filthy beggar. You can do it, Percy."

"Me, sir? All the way to Stratford?"Percy was astonished.

"Would you save your master from the gallows, Harry? You know her Majesty and Robert Cecil. Once their course is set they'll stop at nothing to get at the bottom of this. You've had more dealings with Will than any of us."

"D'ye think they know Mister Francis writ the Plays?"

"We may as well expect the worst, Harry -- if they ever put the Question to Will. He wont stand up to torture."

Anthony gave his glass to Harry, "Fill it, and one for yourself, ye'll have need of it this night," and as Francis returned to the room, ready for the trip, boots, spurs, sword, hat, cloak, "and one for Francis. Ye'll drink wi' us?"

"I'll drink with you. To the God of successful escapes!"

And so they did.

Then it was out to the black monster, Cerberus, quietly tethered until the flickering torchlight found a responsive fire. He reared up, nostrils flaring.

"Steady, boy, steady," said Anthony firmly but soothingly, and

quieted him down. "Isn't he a beauty?"

"Power perhaps, and speed, but beauty?" Francis shook his head, "Cerberus indeed."

Percy offered to give him a boost aboard but he disdained it and with a little extra effort swung lightly up and over the great height of this half ton and more of animal. Just to feel the reassuring mass of flesh and bone beneath him lightened the heaviness of his heart, somehow. He and Anthony were about the same medium height. The stirrup length was suitable.

"Ye'll not be lingering long at Gorhambury," urged Anthony.

Francis shook his head, "No," and patted Cerberus reassuringly on the neck as he tightened up the reins, "Take care of everything."

"That we will, Francis," replied Anthony reassuringly, "get thee gone!"

"Aye, sir," agreed Harry and he offered Francis the torch he held.

That was refused.

"There be enough moon for me this night," he said to Harry, "and Edgeware Road is as familiar as the Strand!"

He flicked the reins at the same time Anthony slapped Cerberus on the rump and thundered off down Gray's Inn Road toward Holborn.

CHAPTER NINE

"Does our love mean so little -- "

With Francis safely on his way out of London, Anthony Bacon and Harry Percy let no grass grow under their feet as they set about the equally important task of getting Will Shak'stpur out of England! With Percy on his own nag and Tony on Francis' "spindle legged Italian fancy" the two quickly trotted back to Charterhouse.

There they found the Earl's after-theatre party breaking up, fortunately. All knew that the hunt was on for the actor-manager of the Curtain, the Earl had told them that, but none besides himself had any idea that Francis Bacon was involved in the writing of the plays put on there. Nor did they realize that all London theatres were in jeopardy from the Privy Council proceedings going on that evening at Greenwich.

With his account settled with Chillingsworth, and leave taken of his handsome and lovely guests, the young Earl begged leave to stay over at the Inn. The trio went back to the comparative privacy of the Armada Room -- Tony tipped the boy to leave be the cleanup -- while they settled the details.

At first the Earl of Southampton was all for making the long ride up to Warwick and nearby Stratford himself, with Percy; but Tony prevailed on him to leave the palaver in the capable hands of Harry Percy.

"M'Lord, let us arouse no suspicion that we have caught wind of this plot against us, by absenting ourselves from London too!" objected Tony. "Francis' frequent trips to Gorhambury for his health are well known. They'll not suspicion him for that. Nor will they be concerned about the absence of Percy here; he could be at Gorhambury with his master."

"Aye," the young Earl replied glumly, "I suppose it would be best for us to keep the watch here in the City, and observe how this matter of the Curtain goeth -- though the summer will be dull without it."

"There's the Rose and the Swan in the liberty of the Clink, m'Lord," observed Percy, "they're still open."

"Though from what I've heard about the Swan's latest play, The Isle of Dogs," replied Anthony, "they may be in jeopardy, too."

Southampton grimaced, "Pity the poor devil who wrote that!"

"Two of them, m'Lord," said Percy, "Tom Nashe and Ben Jonson. Jon-

son acts in it, too."

"Our concern this hour, this moment," said Southampton, "is another actor who carries a certain secret in his bosom. It must be kept hid if it costs a thousand pounds! Come!"

The young Earl stood up abruptly and started toward the door. Tony's heart leaped for joy within him. Southampton had taken his suggestion as his own. A bribe of that size would buy any ordinary man's absence from England.

"You are mounted, I take it," said Southampton to them. They both nodded. "Then we go to my place by separate ways, me in my carriage."

Meanwhile, the young barrister whose dramatic and heart-stirring ideas were the cause of all this was still in London stirring another heart.

Lady Hatton hadn't been completely happy when Francis had politely turned down the invitation to the two of them to attend the young Earl's dinner party at Charterhouse, his excuse the press of work. Much as they had seen of each other the last two days, she was growing painfully aware of his absence. The charm of his company was irresistible. Yet her own affairs were pressing enough that she had welcomed the opportunity for a quiet evening at Hatton House, to be with her little daughter, to go over household accounts, correspondence, wardrobe, and all those things bespeaking a lady of position and means in the Elizabethan court.

So it was with mixed emotions that she received the butler's announcement of the presence of Mister Francis Bacon. Had he decided that she was more important than his business? Whatever it was? Should she have Higginbotham show him in to the little drawing room where the two of them had been going over household accounts? But she couldn't wait. She was presentable. She dismissed Higginbotham, picked up a small candelabra of three and walked out into the dark, across the great hall to the foyer. She didn't believe in keeping the place ablaze with light when no one was about. Higginbotham had lit one candle there but it did little but reveal a dark figure, hatted and cloaked in somber black. When he turned at her arrival the clank of a sword told her he was armed. This total impression caused her to pause with a slight frown.

"Francis?"

He would have longed to move boldly forward and take her in his arms for a farewell kiss, but their affair hadn't gotten to the place where he could forget she was a lady and he a commoner! He swept off his hat into a bow and would have stepped forward to kiss her hand, the good one, but it held the candelabra aloft.

"M'Lady Elizabeth, forgive this intrusion but it hath come; all is discovered."

The quiet, firm tone in which he said this didn't quite succeed in allaying her alarm.

"What is discovered? Cannot you speak more clearly, Francis?"

"Are we alone?"

"Aye," she replied rather petulantly, "thinkest thou Hatton House is acrawl with schemers and plotters?"

"No matter," he went on with a shrug, "it'll be all over London by morning. The Curtain has been raided by her Majesty's troops. The hue and cry is out for actor Will Shagsburr!"

Lillibet gasped and drew back. Her injured hand went to her breast. The other trembled as understanding of Francis' present danger swept through soul and body. She set the dandelabra on a near table and leaned on it to steady herself.

"Doth this mean that -- ?" she hesitated to finish the question.

"We think it best not to tarry long in London."

Then she was in his arms and he knew again the sweet triumph of that magical presence, all curves and soft, and sweet perfume. It made him dizzy for a moment. He, who thought he was all mind and no heart, suddenly found himself all heart and no mind! She hadn't kissed him, but clung tight, her face on his shoulder. When the stinging ecstasy had subsided a little, he freed one hand, tilted her face up and pressed the full lips to his. The poetry, this time, was in their bodies.

Could he have had her then, in one last mad embrace? Perhaps, first love is ever desperate at first parting. Each tender moment is doubly precious, to be savored to the utmost. But it was Lillibet who finally broke the spell.

"Must you go far?" she whispered.

"Far enough. Thou knowest the Queen and her fury," he whispered in reply.

"But surely no one suspects you?"

"To wait here to discover that would be folly."

"But I remember their saying at the Curtain yesterday," she excitedly pushed away from him a little, "actor Will isn't there. He's at Stratford. Isn't that way up at Warwick?"

"Aye, but if he's apprehended and brought to Topcliffe -- "

Lillibet shuddered and clung to him again, refusing to look up into

his face.

"You must go before it is too late," she forced herself to say it, "but where?"

"Dare I burden you with such knowledge, Lillibet?"

"Francis!" she protested, jerking away from him and looking him in the face again. "Dont you trust me?"

"Is it honorable? Is it just? To draw the innocent Lady Hatton into this whirlpool of statecraft? We strike for a liberty utterly distasteful to the Cecils."

"Not to <u>this</u> Cecil!"

She pushed from him and backed to the little hall table with the light, leaning lightly against it. He did not move, except to drop his hands to his sides, contrite.

"Does our love mean so little -- " she blurted out, and then stopped in mid-sentence, blushed at the revelation and hid her face from him.

Francis moved quickly to hold her in his arms, but now there was resistance to his attempted kiss -- which only made him the more desirous to taste again the wine of those lips, and less cautious.

"'Tis no secret, lass, I ride to Gorhambury this night," he whispered in her shell-pink ear. Her face was still turned away so he kissed that ear, biting the lobe lightly. "Higginbotham knows I'm here. A word to your father and they'll be after you. I know my cousin Robert, m'Lady!"

Yielding to his entreating arms she circled his neck with hers and kissed him full and long.

"Not Lady Hatton," she whispered finally, "just Elizabeth, who would hold you here forever. Should my uncle learn from others of your presence here this night, I'll tell him I know not where you went from here, except to your quarters at Gray's Inn."

Lillibet would have accompanied him outside to his horse but he would not allow it. His blood singing through his veins he stepped quickly out from under the porte cochere. Not so quickly, though, as to miss a darker shadow out of the corner of his eye there in the gloom. As he mounted the huge black lightly there was a whiff of perfume, cloying, almost suffocatingly man-made among the delicious odors of the lush gardens round about. He shook it from him as he trotted toward the gate house. The moon was higher, showing brightly through scattered clouds. His way would be well lighted --

"And so would be that of any who might follow," he murmured.

Tom, the gateman, awake and alert, was right there to let him out.

"Did 'e see ye, Mister Bacon?" as he swung one gate open.

"Who was that, Tom?"

"It was Sir Hugh Beeston, Mister Bacon, askin' arter you."

Bacon laughed -- it was forced a little -- and put a coin into the waiting man's palm.

"Tell Sir Hugh I ride to Greenwich on the Queen's business. I'll see him there!"

Upon which he spurred Cerberus and trotted off into the night, but when he reached Holborn Circus he turned right through the press of traffic toward High Holborn, rather than left, toward Newgate and Cheapside.

A confused jumble of thoughts and feelings cluttered Francis' heart and mind for miles after leaving Hatton Place. The ugly black monster beneath him had a will of his own and once pointed in the right direction, Francis gave him his head to gallop on the smoother, straighter stretches. Sensitive as he was, he could never abuse an animal; and he soon felt a unity with the beast which made them as one. Cerberus sensed his desire for speed and Francis let him choose his own pace. It was a good one.

It was a real shock and a depressing one to have discovered Sir Hugh Beeston so close on his heels. The net result was to neutralize the exhilaration of the parting with Lillibet and throw him into an introspective mood which oscillated between angry despair and profound depression on the long night ride to Gorhambury. Regardless of how he considered his situation it was a bleak one, with only a traitor's noose as a final solution, unless he could escape from England before the Queen's men could catch up with him.

Would his mother really be so ruthless and cruel as to destroy him in this manner? Yes, he was forced to admit that in one of her rages she very likely would. But of course Beeston was acting only for Cecil. That wily fox was trying to keep tabs on him so that when hue and cry turned in his direction, the chase would be a quickly successful one.

Yet try as he would, he could not see himself leaving England. Beyond Gorhambury all was a void which even his splendid mind could not penetrate.

The two miles or so along Oxford to Edgeware Road were quickly passed on Cerberus' broad back. He couldn't help but be thankful for his brother's choice of a steed that night, and for the masterful horse breeding supervised by his father, the Earl of Leicester, years earlier. He was plain Robert Dudley when Elizabeth ascended the throne

She made him her Master of Horse. Gossip had it that this was only so she could have her lover riding close behind her in her train. This was true, but it was also true that Robert threw himself into this job with tremendous drive and organizing skill. Choice horseflesh was purchased all over Europe, imported into England and bred to local stock.

This night, Leicester's first son by Elizabeth was benefitting from the excellent result of that work of forty years ago. Cerberus was the ideal combination bred for both brawn and speed, a warhorse, trained originally to carry its master in full armor for hours in battle, with speed and wind for the attack and for retreat to safety. It softened somewhat the leaden ache in his own heart as he patted and talked to the splendid beast beneath him.

"Good Cerberus, brave Cerberus, carry us swiftly home from London. Mayhap, for the last time."

Cricklewood was behind him. Soon there was Hendon over on the right, church spire, shops and houses bathed in soft moonlight. He looked longingly at the Red Lion Inn at Kingsbury Green as he trotted by. Many a time, both going and coming, had he stopped there to slake the thirst of a dusty road. Sounds of merriment and the aura of human warmth and companionship pulled at him but he durst not stop and leave a record of his passing.

"We must haste, Cerberus," and he urged his black steed from a trot to a gallop. The thunder of the great hooves setting dogs barking along the way. Some came running and nipped at his heels but there was no deviation from that set course.

Fear told him to drive the animal to the utmost, but wisdom over rode his fears and reigned up at times. Once it was in a wood, dark and silent. There he sat and listened in vain for the sounds of pursuit. Only the rustle of a vagrant breeze in the leaves and the sound of Cerberus' heavy breathing disturbed the silence. Again it was at a ford. He allowed the horse the briefest of drinks as they paused in mid-stream. Once across, Francis dismounted and refreshed himself, too, Prone by the gently rippling waters he listened again for the dread sound. He had thrown Beeston off the track then, for the time being at least.

Edgeware was past and this long, straight Roman road from London finally made its first turn, through the site of a forgotten Roman village, Svilloniacae, where he and his foster-father, Sir Nicholas, had years before excavated for artifacts of that ancient civilization. Time only for a fleeting memory of that happy day as the road swung northwest again and Cerberus' eager hoofs entered the straight stretch to Radlett. Francis gave the beast his head again and the wind whistled past his ears.

There was comfort in the road, the wind and the rhythmic thunder of the great hoofs beneath. He squeezed at Cerberus' sides with his knees. Oh, that this ride through moonlight and English countryside

could go on forever, with all care and trouble left behind! Then it happened. Cerberus tripped and went down, throwing Francis clear and into the ditch. How long he lay there unconscious he could not know, one minute or an hour, except that the moon did seem lower in the sky.

His horse! He sat up and looked dizzily and wildly around. The faithful beast was standing quietly nearby, nibbling at the grass along the side of the road. He heaved a sigh of relief and sank gratefully back into some cushioning weeds. One big white blossom caught his eye. It was trumpet-shaped and its big, bell-like opening fully five inches across was wide to the moonlight and the dimly breaking dawn. Henbane! He was lying in a growth of the purple-stemmed, broad-green-leafed vine which extended for yards along the ditch. Here was a subtle poison, belladonna, which could painlessly put him in a dream-like trance from which there was no returning to the flesh. It would be a slow, neat, sure way of escape from the shame of the trial which lay ahead of him, from the filthy horrors of Elizabethan dungeons, torture by Topcliffe, and execution.

Sure of his course now Francis sat up again, dizzy from an aching head but otherwise sound of wind and body. There was the bleeding bruise on his scalp to remind him of his headlong fall. He found his hat nearby, stood up, pulled his sword and cut off a yard or so of the tough vine. He made sure that on it were several of the ripe seed pods which contained the lethal dose needed. He wrapped the vine around his wrist, remounted Cerberus and was off and running through the startled Hamlet of Radlett.

River Colney soon blocked their path but not for long. Here he stopped not for drink nor allowed Cerberus a nip. As he approached Frogmore in the rapidly lightening morn, he was loath to ride through St. Albans and be recognized by some early rising yeoman so he swung off to the left over Bone Hill and toward Chiswellgreen. This road was little better than a trail. It slowed him down but Cerberus could pick his footing in the dawn light. The crossing at Potterscrouch was deserted. Appspond was quiet, a perfect mirror for the glory of the eastern sky -- until Cerberus' muffled thunder startled the fowl and a honking duck took off amid a thousand ripples. Then past Hill End and the gardens of Gorhambury were before him. This familiar and beloved place, redolent of the lush growth of July, alive with the morning songs of his friends, the birds, touched deeply and tears welled up.

"A sad farewell, this, Cerberus, to land I love best."

Well in among the apple tree and the plum, he dismounted and gave his mount a sharp slap on the rump to send him toward the distant stables and the tower of Gorhambury, visible above the orchard trees. He half-blindly found his way to a secluded bench. It had known his meditations before when the world had gone against him. Well hidden it was, arched over of vines heavy with grapes even now promising the ripe fullness of a good harvest.

"Self murder," he said aloud as he contemplated the loaded pods

of seeds of the poisonous plant in his hands, the stems a darker, more sinister purple than the first flush on the grapes overhead. "Better the ignominy of this than shame the proud house and fair name of Sir Nicholas Bacon with the mark of traitor."

The tough spiny pods defied his fingers and he had need of the point of his sword for opening. The half-dozen on his length of vine were treated thus, to give him a cup-full or more of the heady stuff. Even as he did this a shudder shook him from head to foot. Was it fear? Or shame? Or only early morning chill? A flagon of steaming wine from Chillingsworth's, or from the Gorhambury kitchen nearby, would have been the tastiest drink in the world just then.

"Is there nothing to wash this lethal breakfast down?" he looked around helplessly. "Henbane, do thou thy work well, even as I have worked ill!"

Steadying one trembling hand with the other he placed a huge pinch of the seed in his mouth and began chewing. Some were firm and some still soft and juicy. The taste was not disagreeable. So it was easy to swallow them down and take another mouthful. In his weakened condition after an all-night ride, no sleep and no breakfast, he knew it shouldn't be long for the poison to take affect.

Francis expected a sharp agony of writhing and pain from the stomach. The first response was a sort of glow spreading through his body, a general loosening of those ties which bind consciousness to flesh. Wave after wave of giddiness swept over him. Manfully, he continued chewing and swallowing the seed until will could no longer control the body. He stretched out on the bench and was gone.

CHAPTER TEN

Beeston, Lillibet and the Ride

Happy to have seen Francis again and sad over the sudden turn of events in the life of her lover, it was a troubled Lady Hatton who left the hallway, dismissed the butler for the night, looked briefly in on her sleeping daughter and, with the help of Bridget, prepared for bed herself.

Her aching heart told her she should have gone with Francis for that long ride through the night, but would she, had he said the word? To her surprise, she realized she would have dared another scandal to be with him in this crisis.

"Is 'e in sore trouble, mum?" asked Bridget.

"Who?"

"The barrister, Mister Bacon," the little minx replied knowingly. She was wrapping her mistress' hand with a clean white cloth strip. "'E was 'ere a bit ago, a fine gentleman."

"However did you know?"

"Higginbotham told me. I told him somepin, too."

"What was that, Bridget?"

"Sir Hugh Beeston was 'ere, lookin' arter Mister Bacon."

Which information startled Lady Hatton so she jerked her hand.

"Ouch!" and Bridget stopped wrapping. "Dont stop now, Bridget, finish it, and brush my hair and then to bed -- both of us."

"Yes, mum."

"How did you know Sir Hugh was here?"

"I seen 'im. 'E tipped me to tell where Mister Bacon was ridin'."

"And did you tell him?" Lillibet tried to appear calm.

""I didn't know, mum, but 'e learned it from the gateman."

"Oh?"

"'E told 'im 'e was ridin' to Greenwich to see the Queen."

"Oh-h-h," Lillibet breathed a sigh of relief and relaxed.

"Did 'e do somepin' wrong, mum?" She pinned the fresh bandage with a bright little clasp.

"No, that was all right because Mr. Bacon is safe."

"Safe, mum?"

"Never mind, Bridget, get on with my hair. We should be abed now. We've a busy day tomorrow."

Bridget carefully then brushed out the long dark tresses as her mistress admired herself in the mirror. She could indeed be proud of the firm young body, fully rounded and ripe for love and motherhood, its radiant curves aglow in the soft candlelight and scarce concealed by her filmy negligee.

Once abed and Bridget gone with the light, sleep did not come easily to Lillibet. That same moon which made bright patterns across her floor and bed was lighting Francis' long ride out to Gorhambury. She breathed a prayer for his safety and comfort and fell to wondering what lay beyond Gorhambury for him, and her? Brief visions of Francis arrested and brought to trial like a common criminal were too horrible to contemplate. She firmly refused them harbor and fell asleep, to dream of Francis receiving honors from the Queen and herself standing proudly by.

"Mum. Mum!"

It was Bridget gently shaking her bed. Lillibet reluctantly opened her eyes to see her maid dimly outlined in the darkened room. Dawn was lightening the eastern horizon. She had slept though it seemed she had only just closed her eyes.

"It's 'im, mum, Sir Hugh. 'E's back again to see ye."

"What, at this ungodly hour? Tell him to come back later," and Lady Hatton stretched and turned over to go back to sleep.

"'E says its about Mister Bacon, mum. 'E must know where 'e is," Bridget was pleading with her.

With this her mistress sat up straight in bed and rubbed the sleep from her eyes.

"Get my robe, help me with my hair. I'll tell Sir Hugh where Mr. Bacon is -- but he'll be telling me a few things, too! Getting me up at this horrible hour!"

Like many a young, high-born Elizabethan lady of that time, Lillibet slept nude in summer time; but Bridget soon had her presentable in Venetian silk and lace, her gorgeous hair lightly pinned into a semblance of order and streaming back over her shoulders.

"Where'll you see 'im, mum?" asked Bridget.

"Downstairs, of course. I dont want that stinking fop smelling up my privy chamber!" exclaimed Lillibet. "That's where he is, I hope."

"Yes, mum," replied Bridget meekly. "I'll go tell 'im."

"And if Higginbotham's up, have him get someone to warm up some wine and a muffin or two. I'll be needing food for this visit! Sir Hugh will, too, no doubt."

"Yes, mum."

And Bridget left her to put the final touches on her toilette. She was soon ready and on her way down to meet this man of indeterminate sex and undefinable morals. Hatton House was light enough now that he was easily visible in the great hall, slumped wearily in a chair. He had the grace to stand when she approached him, without the formality of a greeting.

"What meanest this intrusion? Hast thou come with some world-shaking message from my uncle?"

"Your ladyship," he made a sweeping bow and, with a tired smirk, "I beg your pardon, but indeed your uncle and her majesty, the Queen, are most curious as to the whereabouts of Francis Bacon."

Her face flamed up scarlet red and she jerked back as though slapped.

"Are you so presumptuous as to think he housed under this roof this night?"

"Let us not mince words, m'Lady," the smirk vanished and Sir Hugh was all threatening seriousness. "Mr. Bacon <u>was</u> here last night. I know it. Your servants know it. You know it. If he is not here now, where did he go?"

"I am not Mr. Bacon's valet, nor his butler, nor his secretary, that his whereabouts are of immediate concern to me, Sir Hugh Beeston!" she replied angrily. "Nor can I conceive any reason why they should be of any concern to her Majesty."

"Sir Robert hath been in Privy Council meeting all night, We have just returned from Greenwich.

"Didst thou not see him there?"

"Who? Francis Bacon? Of course not! Neither did anyone else."

"Strange," Lillibet replied, deeply puzzled, "he told me that such was destination. Sit down, man. Thou art tired. Higginbotham should soon be here with wine and muffins."

She despised this dandified fop. He reeked of sweat, horse and human, and this, combined with that sickening masculine-feminine perfume he affected, made his presence that early morning hour almost too much to bear; but she had need of information, too,

Beeston sprawled; careless of his long curls he leaned his head back on the chair and released a grateful sigh through pursed lips.

"Couldst thou make that eggs and butter too, m'Lady?"

Lady Hatton clapped her hands. The sound seemed strangely loud in the early morning quiet of the great hall.

"Now, Sir Hugh," she chose a straight-backed chair close by and facing him, "why all this concern over the whereabouts of Mr. Bacon?" She was all innocent, womanly curiosity.

As he was framing his reply, Higginbotham showed up wide awake and flawlessly liveried, handsome in his heavy-bodied, wide-shouldered way. She ordered eggs and butter for the two of them and hurried him back to the kitchen.

"It's treason, m'Lady, treason," replied Beeston slowly, after the butler was gone. He said it as though such were an everyday occurrence. "The news is all over London, or will be by mid-morning. Every playhouse in London is shut down, will be torn down, and many an actor will be in the Clink."

"Didst thou come here at this ungodly hour to insult me, Mr. Beeston? Thinkest thou Lady Hatton would have ought to do with a common actor?" Now she was properly insulted.

"No, m'Lady, thou wouldst not; but the writers of these treasonous masques are considered equally guilty, nay, more so; and Mr. Bacon doth write for the Chamberlain company."

"This is the strangest tale I have heard in all this world!" Her angry astonishment was obvious but Sir Hugh continued with the facts she was anxious to hear.

"The posts are out, closing the theatres. Then they ride to the peasant-towns of the west with the speed of the wind. Her Majesty has offered great rewards to them that brings them in, dead or alive, actors, playrights."

"To think that the honorable son of Sir Nicholas Bacon should even be suspected of treason," Lillibet shook her head. "I cant

believe it. This is some wild tale cooked up by my uncle, I swear. I know him. Did he stuff her Majesty's ears with this lie?"

"That he did, m'Lady, but it's the truth." He started up straight from his chair. "Thinkst thou Sir Robert would risk his office if it were not true? Her Majesty told Cecil that if he could prove Francis Bacon wrote Richard II she'd have him executed!"

Lillibet started back in shock at this, nor did she try to hide it from Beeston. She was saved from making an immediate rejoinder by Higginbotham, who served them each a tray of eggs and butter, toasted muffins and steaming wine. He discreetly retired but not so far that he couldn't overhear some of their conversation. Beeston fell to with a will and Lillibet found herself surprisingly hungry. The warm food was calming and reassuring. She was silently thankful she had ordered it, and for Higginbotham's efficiency.

"My uncle hath no proof that Francis writ the plays, Richard II, Richard III or any other. All London showeth great interest in Masquing. Thine own attendance at the Theatre and the Curtain is more often than that of Mr. Bacon!"

Beeston's mouth was too full of food for a reply so she took another tack.

"None but a fool would believe that woe-begone, hateful, fat creature, Shagsburre, is a mask for the brilliant lawyer. Her Majesty has known him since he was a child."

"Thou knowest well her rages," replied the fop with a leer as he mouthed his eggs. He gestured toward her bandaged finger. "The Queen swore that every man engaged in the production of Richard II on the stage, unless they gave up the real author, should die a bloody death."

"But suppose Will is the real author of the plays?"

"Pah," Beeston snorted, "everyone knows the fat fellow cannot write. These much admired plays are the work of a gentleman -- and a pagan. The Bishop of Worcester said so himself."

"A pagan?" asked Lillibet in disbelief.

"Aye, the Bishop told the Queen the purpose of the plays is the destruction of the Christian religion. Though he admired their noble composition and said there is no equal in the English language since the time of Gower."

Lillibet didn't quite know what to say to this; for Beeston's words were indeed a sort of proof of Francis' guarded admissions of the day before. She was thankful to have breakfast before her. Eating gave her an excuse for no immediate reply and time to think. But Beeston waxed expansive for the same reason. After all, the beautiful

creature before him was a Cecil.

"Thine uncle instructed the posts, when they find Shakspere and his men, to offer them immunity for their past misdeeds if they make a clean breast of it and tell who really prepared the dangerous play of Richard II. Her majesty even suggested terms of grace and pardon to the Stratford clown and his fellows -- even a reward -- if he will tell the name of the man who furnished him with Richard II and the rest of these plays."

"Suppose actor Will gets wind of this plot and doth fly the country?"

"The posts go unarmed," replied Beeston, waving his knife expansively. "The officers are to say nothing about this to anyone. When they arrest Shakspere they at first are to treat him kindly and ask him why he should try to injure the Queen, who had never harmed him, and appeal to his better feelings. He's to be urged to confess to save his own life and fortune."

"Pray God he doesn't!" said Lillibet defiantly.

"M'Lady," replied Beeston in some surprise, "wouldst allow traitors to go unpunished?"

"No, rather would I see an innocent man go free of the taint of treason, of the ignominy of trial and punishment. The Stratford clown means nothing to me. Mr. Bacon meaneth much -- " A mouthful of toasted muffin was a period to this last.

"Hast thou forgotten thy uncle? Surely this threat to his position and power, his great responsibility to the Queen and the State, mean more to you than this nameless, penniless, landless barrister."

Lady Hatton's fair complexion flushed red at this and it was not lost on Beeston. Her first angry reaction to his contemptuous tone was held back. Perhaps he had given her the lead she was looking for. Her response was carefully measured.

"This puzzleth me." She nodded her head as though in partial agreement with him and looked down at her plate. "Mr. Bacon is landless, without honors, position or power; yet my uncle feareth him more than any other man at court. Canst thou tell me why?"

She raised her eyes, those limpid pools of warmth and loveliness and beamed a dazzling half-smile straight at him. He in his turn was discomfitted by this direct and guileless question, and turned his gaze down at his food.

"Thou knowest not what thou ask," Beeston replied quietly.

"Then I'm afraid thou must go empty-handed, Sir Hugh. There is a price on my information which thou art not willing to pay."

"Thou art a Cecil," he said emphatically, irritated. "Is that not enough? Thy first loyalty should be to thy father, thine uncle, and his father."

"If I were a man, yes. My mind would tell me where my best interest lay; but I am a woman who looketh to her heart! I respect my uncle for his power and position, but I love Mr. Bacon for himself."

There, she had blurted out what had been building up within her to unsuspected pressures for the past 24 hours. Sir Hugh was shocked, too. He stood up quickly, showing much greater vigor than when he arrived, and put his breakfast tray aside with a crash.

"You refuse to reveal the whereabouts of your lover? You fool. You silly, silly fool!" He shook his finger at her.

Lady Hatton remained calm for the moment, and seated.

"Fool, Sir Hugh? Fool I would be if thou received precious information and I received none." She took a long thirsty drink of her wine and set the cup down decisively on her tray.

"If thou hast given thy heart to that unfortunate man, trouble and sorrow will be thy lot for the rest of thy days, Lady Hatton. He's damned in the book of heaven and fated to be a commoner all his days -- if he doesn't lose his head the sooner."

"My uncle is not God, Sir Hugh!"

"No, but the Queen is, m'Lady -- to her loyal subjects!" Sir Hugh was still shaking his finger. Now he paced back and forth before her. "And to her sons even more so. The merest threat to her throne and sceptre evokes the wildest rage and swift reprisal."

"Her sons, Sir Hugh? Speakest thou of <u>sons</u> to our virgin Queen?" She sat in open-mouthed amaze.

"Yes, m'Lady," he replied with a mixture of amusement and contempt as he stood directly before her, feet apart, hands clasped behind his back for emphasis, "her sons, Francis Bacon and the Earl of Essex -- and Leicester was their father."

"He's a bastard then," she said simply as though she couldn't believe it.

The Queen and Leicester were honorably married at the home of Lord Pembroke in London, Christmas Eve, before Francis Bacon was born in January, but Beeston wasn't about to give her that solace.

"Now you have your precious information, m'Lady. I demand mine. Where is he?"

She was still too much in a state of shock to be offended by his insolent manner, or to reply. He stepped forward, took the tray from

her lap and jerked her rudely to her feet.

"Where is he?" he snarled, and shook her, but not so violently that she lost sight of her own purpose to send him on a wild goose chase.

"To Dover! To Dover! Thou fool, unhand me!"

But Beeston needed no order from her. He did unhand her as quickly as he had laid hold of her, and backed quickly away, with a sweeping, mocking bow.

"Ten thousand pardons, m'Lady, but this affair of the State taketh precedence over thine affair of the heart. And thou have regard for thy fair name, put not your future in the hands of one who hath no future."

He emphasized this last by withdrawing his sword part way from its scabbard and ramming it back home. He picked up his hat with a flourish, thanked her for her early morning hospitality and headed for the front entrance way.

"Higginbotham!" called Lillibet, with an order that was scarcely necessary, "show Sir Hugh to the door!"

Higginbotham moved with his usual alacrity but Sir Hugh was gone before he could get there, leaving the massive oaken portal ajar behind him. Lillibet heard him mount and the clatter of his horse as he sped down the drive toward the gate. When her butler returned she ordered him to clear away the breakfast trays.

"And, Higginbotham, order up my horse and one for yourself, the best we have. We ride for St. Albans in half an hour. Haste, now!"

"Yes, m'Lady," replied this matchless majordomo, with only the slightest flicker of a raised eyebrow to indicate that 20-mile rides at six in the morning were scarcely a routine matter at Hatton House!

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Bacon's Voyage To Inner Space

In a remote corner of the gardens of Gorhambury lay a prone figure, well hid from prying eyes. Lifeless it was to all outward appearances; for the deadly poison was already loosing the bonds which clutch life to form. Bacon had not breakfasted and the radical chemical sped its effects quickly through the empty stomach.

There was a warming fire which spread out through the lower regions. His solar plexus center was first activated before the release moved on down to the sex center at the base of the spine. It was as though he had opened himself up surgically and could see inside with perfect clarity, though he was seeing force, not form. Instead of writhing in pain as he had been led to expect, it was just the opposite. He was floating free in a wonderfully sensuous river of his own creative energies, triggered off by the henbane. It was taking him behind his self-control, this pagan fire, like an endlessly changing and ever-flowing orgasm.

Reminded of physical reality, Francis assayed to open his eyes. Brilliantly rainbow-hued sunlight filtered down through the leaves of the apple trees overhead. The world had never seemed like this before, with every color a rainbow of beauty, every sound of nature a symphony of infinite harmony. A lark stopped its search for unfortunate insects and eyed him quizzically. After an experimental chirp it opened up and poured itself out in an ecstasy of sound that swirled him away in cascades of brilliant color, on into infinity.

Back to his body again, fire was glowing through the lower part. Warm, probing fingers of poison searched out every control of his civilized facade and loosed it. It seemed that all restraint was gone, his life forces were flowing off in all directions. So real was this feeling of release that he raised his head and looked down in wonderment to see if he had wet himself, but all was quiet on the water front. He lay back again to revel inwardly in the approach of death -- if this indeed was what it was!

The bonds of his sexual control were next. Detached, impersonal, he saw the release of this creative energy as pale green writhing serpents, thrusting their vaguely defined heads upwards toward some consummation devoutly to be wished.

Then, through this wondrous self-surgery he saw his morning hunger, a colorless, consuming, devouring force in his stomach area,

turning upon itself because there was nothing there to consume but the henbane.

"I wonder when the touching of the higher centers will come," he thought. "There must be others besides these of the animal passions, deeper levels not explored. I want to experience them. There must be need for union with That from whence we come. If this is death, I welcome it as a friend."

A wave of giddiness swept over him and he looped out from the body in some long arc through multi-colored space.

"This is the immortality some have at their death bed, a bird's eye view of all life. Such a vast, vast universe."

Then again there was a blank, how long he did not know. Vaguely conscious again he could not be indifferent to the raging fire within.

"Oh, the terrible force of this drug. I can <u>feel</u> the serpent power within. Is this what I had to control this life just ending? To cope with it in myself before I could cope with it in other people? I have been trying blindly all this time. Now it is too late."

Tears coursed down his cheeks. He could feel the wetness of them. Yet in this detached state it could have been happening to someone else. Who was Francis Bacon, anyhow?

"Oh, the power in the earth! Yet people think this is all. It o'erwhelms me! This is what holds us in the flesh, and yet blind to it, we mortals. Here am I, looking into undreamed worlds of consciousness, words for which escape me -- I have no pen to scribe a message; nor is there one to read."

He thought, then, for the first time since he lay down, of Lillibet. His immediate reaction was a wave of self-pity which sent tears down his cheeks again; but in that miraculous state, free of all form, it was quickly replaced by a glowing, sensuous fire which spread quickly through his loins as she stood before him, a vision of warmth and loveliness. The bitter loneliness and desperation of that night ride were swept away in a tide of passion which cried for solace, for completion, for understanding which only love of woman can give. This gorgeous creature before him, pagan in her nakedness even as he was shorn of all civilized coverings, opened her arms and heart with a cry of recognition and welcome. She was all woman and he, all man, moved to perfect union, unhindered by the flesh.

Locked in her all-embracing response to his need he experienced the sumum bonum of all unions, the Divine Wedding. It was an endless, ageless consummation which swept him on and on 'til both were lost in a sea of Light, not even I Am, but only I.

Even eternity must end, for a mere mortal. From this peak of ecstasy he was swept down again, alone now, to some level of elemental

passion below the belt. As the flames roared up through him he thought surely this must be the end. What mortal body could stand it? Even as he burned he thought, and mused over the searing memory of the Divine Ecstasy.

"Marriage. What a poor substitute it is for this! If only mortals could flee the prison of the flesh for the perfect union." Then he realized, "This is what the Church attempts in the consecration of the nuns when they die to the old self and are born anew, the Brides of Christ, this ecstasy of the Divine Union."

The waves of fire swept over him from crotch to head, to his feet and back again. Surely the body must give way, must give up eventually. So vividly conscious of this interior life, what was reality?

"This is the only reality I have, this present moment in eternity. Make the most of it. Oh-h-h-h-h-h-h-h-h-h, the power seething within me, separating consciousness from the body, just crying for expression, for life, more life -- and more life!"

In these last moments before departing this mortal coil it seemed that he was to review and know all those well-springs of creation which make mortals what they are, or would be.

"This is what happens to great leaders when this power touches them -- my mother, Elizabeth. No wonder she becomes drunk with it, addicted to it, and constantly turns to this illusion of reality! And this is all she has, this elemental passion, sacrificing her sons, her husband, friends, the people, the state, to this."

In that curiously impersonal way of the drug addict and free from the tomb of the flesh, he desired to know more and see more of this raw energy which makes power addicts of kings and emperors. He saw all creation as coming to a point temporarily crystallizing there, then exploding at tangents along which new figures of breathtaking beauty were built.

"Oh-h-h-h-h-h, these gorgeous geometric figures in harmony, endlessly going out in building, in climax and release. Where doth one start and finish on this endless merry-go-round of life? Each race, nation, clan or tribe is a measure of reality for each individual in it. All is done for one cycle. I've finished this one, a failure. Is there a purpose to creation? I must act as though there is for death certainly isn't the end. It is only the beginning of another reality. When do I start?"

As though in answer to this there was another roaring burst of energy through him that made him shake from head to foot. To his surprise he still had a little body consciousness. He wasn't free of the carcass yet! But consciousness of it was lost in a plunge into the interior of the earth.

"This is Vulcan! I'm in the forge of the gods. Is this to be my hell? The hades of the suicides?"

Vague mental images finally assumed gigantic, black, angular forms. They were both fiery and electrical, all set off with lurid red flames and brilliant flashes of light, lightning-like in their intensity. Dwarfed in the immensity of this primeval chaos, the mental atmosphere and activity of which he had been so proud all his life was burnt up, hammered out of him with the overwhelming images, the waves of raw power which swept through him. But even this came to an end finally and he surfaced again in the quiet beauty of the garden.

He was aware of his prone form, birds twittered in the apple tree overhead, each rainbow-hued with a glory of color where the sunlight touched it. As for the sun, how could it have moved up into the heavens so rapidly? Or was time completely lost to him in this detached state on the rim of the abyss. But why should Francis Bacon care about the movement of the sun now or any other physical thing in this quittance of the flesh. He was amazed that he took so long in dying. The end was not yet. This bout with eternity was building toward some climax which would be achieved in its own good time, reviewing each aspect of creation along the way. The old habit of writing was on him now. How he longed for a secretary.

"Sex beeth only a part, a small part of this creative fire. What beauties of writing, of music, of painting could be created with this sustained orgasm."

Another burst of energy surged through him again, causing him to tremble in the effort to contain it. This time he held on to the body and didn't loop out into space.

"Man's duty is to control this release from the creative centers. Now I know it as I never knew it before. These 'explosions' are tremendous. No wonder those who release them without knowledge or practice of control are shattered, in a moment, trying to capture the Infinite beauty of the universe and crystallize it. Then there must be a return to neutral for another try."

The panic stricken playwrite in him had now given way to the scientist-philosopher, dispassionately observing this self-surgery, relentlessly cutting deep within.

"This is the <u>regenerative</u> fire evoked with this poison. Caught in this vortex I have to hold it, not let go of it. Every artist striveth for this; his corner of eternity. Next cometh balance -- divine energy captured into form only when needed. He yearneth for something greater than himself. He seeth it blessed with union with all life, with each moment of creation, charming in its originality. Like divinely fashioned snowflakes falling, no two moments of eternity are ever the same. Life giving of itself, so simply, yet so profoundly. Oh-h-h-h-h-h-h, this vision of exaltation crying for the beauty of eternity, the over-whelming unity of the One Light."

He was swept away from the flesh again in a wave of dancing, pulsing light. By this the probing fingers of the henbane had pushed through other force centers of the body and were reaching on up into

his head. For the first time he fell to toying with the idea of seeing beings who had passed the Veil before him, his real father the Earl of Leicester, his foster-father Sir Nicholas Bacon, and other illustrious members of the Bacon clan. To his surprise he was back in his body again as far as he could tell. The sun was high overhead now and the world so dazzingly bright he found it hard to distinguish between the inner and the outer consciousness.

"How one clings to the flesh," he mused. He lifted a hand, reached over and touched the other one. Was this Francis Bacon touchigg Francis Bacon? Or some stranger in another world, another time, a robot, jerked by some remote string of consciousness out of eternity?

Another string of consciousness pulled at him, the need to relieve himself. With surprising ease he rolled his body off the rustic bench and stood erect on numb, trembling limbs. Let's see, how did one go about it? This need to think carefully and in sequence each separate action was new. So dissociated was he from the physical that each move had to be thought out in advance and the command consciously passed to the appropriate muscle.

Organ in hand he stood there. Would the urine come? It did. With a surprising feeling of relief he shook the dew off the lilly, carefully and deliberately rearranged his clothes, and thankfully stretched out on the bench again. He was amused that even this commonplace thing should take so much time and trouble, and that it should take so much time to die! He had seen death, had heard of others apparently giving up the ghost in seconds after a sword thrust or other violence. Here was half a day gone and he was still in command of the flesh -- or was the flesh commanding him?

His bemused pondering of this conundrum was disturbed by a new feeling. It was an all-pervading calm, evidence that the henbane had indeed invaded a new realm, a windless level in which all physical was shrouded in a misty glow, immobile. Nature waited. And in that glow a brighter light. Transfixed at first, Francis assayed to turn from it in shame and fright. He could not. That awful presence took shape, not one but two! Glorified in some way, yet human, his foster-father stood before him. There indeed were the portly figure and heavy jowls of Sir Nicholas Bacon. Immaculate in court attire the figure, stern of eye the countenance looked down on him. Beside was another in the quaint, archaic garb of an earlier time. He was Sir Arthur Cooke, renowned ancestor of the Bacon clan.

"Thinkst thou to bring shame on our fair name?" Clear came the words from Sir Nicholas, clear as any physical speech; yet he was twenty years agone from this veil of tears. "What a wild, lawless course thou hast taken, stirring the fires of rebellion in the kingdom. A foolhardy lad thou art indeed, <u>no man</u>, to think thou couldst destroy the Queen with words! This sad state to which thy learning brought thee, taking thy life with thine own hand, for shame! In thy folly thou hast besmirched the fair name of Bacon, befouled our crest with the crime of treason, and made of your noble ancestry a mockery!"

Sir Arthur moved slightly forward, raised his arm, pointed an accusing finger at Francis and said only one ward, "Coward!"

In an agony of shame which threatened to consume him with searing flames of remorse, he rolled off the bench face down on the ground and tried to hide his face from his accusers. Slowly, mercifully, the vision faded, the glamorous aura around leaf, tree and shrub diminished to its more normal appearance. He sat up, still strangely numb, wondering miserably when the final quittance of the flesh would come. Mindful that the ground was damp, even though he couldn't feel it, he clambered slowly back on the bench to yield gratefully to that sweet oblivion which removed all image of the earth on a tide of ecstasy.

But the flesh still commanded, at times, and his flight from the three-dimensional world again was an arc which brought him back to the space and time of Gorhambury, mid-afternoon of July 29, 1597. As he lay there, marvelling again at the almost terrifying inertia of his prone body, he wondered who or what might show up now? Another disembodied mortal from the past? Some wood nymph or gnome from the earth of the orchard in which he lay? Or perhaps some Archangel to sound the trumpet call of final release from the tomb of the flesh?

Earthly sounds met his ears, a crashing through the bushes, the noise of some fool blindly going, profaning his solitude. In the numb grip of the henbane he couldn't have cared less if it were the Queen's men! But no, no male form filled out the soft and sensuous curves of the stylish riding habit that loomed over him. The warm lips covering him with kisses, the large brown eyes, liquid with tears, could belong only to one person.

"Oh, the blood, the blood!" Lillibet exclaimed. "My poor, dear Francis. Higginbotham!" She raised up and called loudly, again. "Higginbotham! He's over here!"

She tried to wipe the blood from the side of his face but it was thoroughly dried from the great blow he had suffered on the night ride so long, long ago. So remote was the physical world now that Francis couldn't quite decide whether he was in or out of it, nor did it matter in the least! His eyes were closed when she found him. The effort necessary to make the decision to open them was beyond him at the moment, so he left them closed. There was more crashing through the brush of that part of the orchard. Another presence invaded his solitude. The heavy breathing, the solid footstep, the masculine odors of leather, horses and sweaty clothing bespoke a man.

"We've got to get him to the house, Higginbotham. I can help carry him."

"Is he dead, m'Lady?"

"Good heavens! Thank the merciful Father, no!" exclaimed Lillibet softly. She breathed a short prayer for his recovery from his attempted murder and stood up.

"Ye wont be needed, m'Lady," said Higginbotham. "I can manage him."

Powerful arms slid under Francis on the bench, as though he were a sack o' groats, and, rag-limp like unto a completely unconscious man, he was carried to the mansion a hundred yards or so away.

Pandemonium and panic raced through the Gorhambury household when Master Francis, blood-stained and limp, was brought in. The long carry was too much even for Higginbotham's great strength and other hands helped to get him up to his room and on the bed. His foster-mother clucked and fluttered around him like a hen over a lost chick. Already she was showing signs of that mental instability which would eventually degenerate into the insanity so artfully portrayed by Francis in Ophelia, in later editions of Hamlet.

The discovery of Anthony's huge black, Cerberus, at the stable, riderless and with manifold signs of a hasty ride from London, had set the household agog early that morning. But Anthony was not to be found after a cursory inspection of the garden and grounds; nor was he in the town of St. Albans. Concern over the mystery had scarcely slackened when Lady Hatton and Higginbotham thundered up the drive in the early afternoon after a breakneck ride from London. For all her breeding and years at court, Lady Ann was scarcely civil to her lovely guest. Already upset over the disturbing finding of her real son's horse, the precipitate arrival of this fashionable court beauty -- and a widow at that! -- from London, in search of her beloved foster son was too much. Lady Ann was more protectively jealous of her Francis than was his natural mother, Elizabeth. To Lady Ann, modern London of 1597 was a sinkhole of corruption. Elizabeth's courtiers were given over to all manner of vice, and the young ladies who frequented the Court were twice damned in the book of Heaven! She was a Puritan to her finger tips.

As Francis lay there in death-like stillness on his bed Lady Ann moaned around the room, her heavy figure in black, her pudgy hands helplessly pawing the air. She wouldn't look at Lady Hatton directly but her disapproval was plain to see. The domestics stood helpless, too, until Lillibet took hold of the situation.

"Fetch water, a basin, ointment, clean white cloths," she said to one of them, and to another, "send to St. Albans for the doctor!"

"Beggin' your pardon, mum, there be no doctor in St. Albans," replied the maid, as tall, thin and cadaverous as her mistress was short and heavy. "There do be an apothecary, Mr. Moore."

"I'll go fetch him, m'Lady," replied Higginbotham quietly, and with Lillibet's quick nod of approval left the room.

"Come, Lady Ann, shall we not undress him and get him in bed before the fever sets in, or a chill?"

This audacious proposal brought Lady Ann up short; indecision

immobilized her; she stared unbelieving at Lillibet. The first maid returned with basin, a jar of ointment, a little box of salve and clean linen over her arm. This one was a sly little minx, but capable.

"Put them down and help me undress the master," she said to the two maids, with a shrug of impatience at the impotent Ann. As his silks piled up on the floor by the bed, Lady Ann moved toward the door to flee the scene entirely, then moved back again as her protective instincts overpowered her.

Lillibet had never undressed a man before; nor did the maids seem expert. Cloak and ruff had come off easily enough. and even his long Spanish leather boots; but when they set to separating hose, nether hose and doublet the intricate combination of pointed laces by which sleeves were laced to armholes, the doublet laced to trunk hose and nether hose, was almost too much for them.

"It's no wonder a gentleman needs his man to help dress and undress him!" exclaimed Lady Hatton in exasperation.

"It is indeed a wonder, mum," said the little minx. It was obvious her remark was directed more at a long expanse of white skinned torso and limb that had finally been exposed.

How did Francis react to this unfamiliar female pawing? It finally penetrated the poisoned fog of indifference which shrouded his mind and feelings and he opened his eyes. The little minx and the tall one shrieked in unison, dropped what they were doing and backed away from the bed as though Francis had returned from the grave to haunt them.

"Oh, Francis, Francis!" exclaimed Lillibet for very joy, fell on him and flooded his lips and cheeks with kisses.

For all he reacted she might as well have been kissing a stone, though there was one feeble gesture which indicated he was dimly aware of though not disturbed about his nakedness.

Oh, the white, white skin of him and the perfectly formed limbs, flawless, slender and smoothly muscled. It was inadequate, this body, perhaps, for military campaigns or jousting yard, but healthily strong for long hours at conference table, for pleadings at the bar, in the Commons, or for tedious, leg-tiring ceremonies at Court.

Fully conscious of Francis' exposed condition herself, Lillibet blushed a little, pulled the sheet partially over him, and got the maids to help finally remove the nether hose to complete his disrobing.

Wringing her hands helplessly in the background, Lady Ann moaned, "Why doesn't the doctor come? Why doesn't the doctor come? Who would commit this deed? Francis had no enemies. All the world lovedhim."

Meanwhile, ignoring her own damaged left finger, Lady Hatton

wrung out a piece of cloth as best she could and started on the caked blood on the side of Francis' face and head. The shock of the cool wetness started him up and caused a violent reaction in the solar plexus. Feeling that he must pewk he rolled to the edge of the bed and leaned over. The little minx grabbed a basin and held it for him, but it was a dry run, an illusion. His stomach heaved and retched but nothing came out. There was nothing there to throw up. He hadn't eaten for eighteen hours and the henbane he had chewed up early that morning had long since passed on into his system and was gradually working its way through every fibre of his body, mind and feelings, and the end was not yet.

Even as he rolled back, with Lillibet solicitously helping him to stretch out, another orgasm of blazing energy began the tidal motion which freed him from the flesh. This promised to be the greatest vision of them all and he vaguely wondered if it wasn't indeed the last, and the end. His lover sensed the change, the withdrawal from physical reality and clung to him, sobbing as though her heart would break. There was no preventing the trance-like stare, the death-rigid state of that dear form.

For Francis that other world grew strangely brighter with an unworldly brightness. Each little detail of his familiar bedroom was sharper and clearer than he had ever seen it. Was he in the room? Or was the room in him? And the four crying women? He felt a remote compassion toward them, part of him felt it, a small part; but this other reality consumed him with its intensity. Again, if this was death, it was the promise of a heaven of reality far more profound than any experienced in the flesh. All his life forces were drawn up, concentrated. The pressure was so great, so intense he wanted to turn away, to cry out in terror at this power which held him in its remorseless grip.

The unearthly brightness of the room formed a center even brighter still. Hypnotized by this slowly forming column, brilliant and glittering, Francis saw a majestic figure, tall, still, yet radiant with life. It was clad in golden armor. A tremendous sword, fully five feet long, was held in the right hand, point down on the floor. In the left was a banner, white, with a ten-pointed figure erect on it, woven in gleaming gold. Twining up through it were the twin serpents of the Caduceus, one white, one black.

As the figure became more distinct to Francis' amazed stare he wondered if the others saw it? But no, they were concerned with him and his deathlike trance condition, which allowed only him to see in two worlds at once. Less and less was he aware of the physical and more and more of this glamorous stranger. The visor on the helmet was up. He could see the face and into the eyes of the unbidden guest. There was a neat and well-trimmed moustache beneath a perfect nose. The face, the style of the armor suggested somehow an Italian nobleman, perhaps Venetian with a touch of northern blood in him, though chin and forehead were covered.

Blood! Could this glorious stranger, radiating light, warmth and

an impersonal love to every corner of the room have human blood? Francis guessed not.

"Speak," he thought aloud, "what bringeth an armed visitor to Gorhambury unannounced?"

If the visitor spoke, his lips did not move, but nevertheless a reply registered on Francis' consciousness. The women did not hear it. They heard only their drug-entranced hero and attributed his words to delirium.

"It is not well," replied the stranger slowly and distinctly. "It is not well that our son, Alban, taketh it upon himself to leave thus abruptly the scene of his labors. Much, much remains to be done at mid-point in this life. Thinkst thou we would let it end by thy hand?"

"I have no stomach for Topclyffe's third degree, nor the hangman's noose at Smithfield."

"Oh, ye of little faith -- in our invisible power or in thine own manifest destiny. Thy mortal remains will rest not in this island, scene of thy labors for another two score years and more."

"Will I come into my rightful heritage?"

"Aye, Alban, but not as thou thinkest, by the Queen's hand. It will be rather by thine own effort and service to the State; after she has gone to her reward. Look not to her Majesty for honors and worldly glory but within thyself. The new age a-dawning asketh not of a man his lineage but his abilities proven in good works. Look not to the past for thy glory, nor to the present, but to a land afar off. The cause for which thou writest, the rule of law, justly conceived and honored by all men high and low, is a noble cause and must needs be served with all thy might; but mark it well, seeds planted in England will bear fruit across the seas. England's enemy seeketh even now with some success to extend its ruthless and bloody empire to the fair lands of the West. This must not be. See thou to it."

"Without titles, honors, place, sir, it seems you expect much. What can I do if I live?"

"Much can be done with what thou hast already begun. Firstly, make the law thy livelihood. It leadeth to the seat of power through support of the people -- without which no throne endureth! Secondly, the state is a school room wherein thou teach the many who will not read. These Masques of thy invention will live far, far beyond thy time on earth. Thirdly, thy beloved philosophy, by this shalt thou uphold the lamp of Truth to inspire and guide those of lesser vision who would lead the people. Fourthly, disdain no opportunity to hold political office. Crown thy life's endeavors with many an hour spent in forming and administering the laws of thy land -- even as He who sustaineth all, forms and administers this Universe. Thus shall thy days be long and thy name honored among the people."

Before this all-pervading power, wisdom and love, what could Francis say? He was dumb, over-awed by the vision of the future and his all-important place in it. How this golden-armored stranger could speak with such assurance he did not know, but the authority of this commanding presence was not to be denied. His musings were interrupted again.

"Know thou that the Church, thine enemy is this life, looketh to its Communion of Saints for spiritual guidance. Even so do thee and thy brethren look to the Lodge of the Masters. We would have revealed ourselves to thee under other circumstances than these but thy foolhardy attempt to foreshorten this life left us no choice. Know this, thou art never alone and we have unlimited means to carry on the Great Work. Call on us and those who serve us. Demand much and much will be given, Alban."

With these final words of instruction but not so much as a farewell the glorious figure faded and was gone.

CHAPTER TWELVE

"How Silver Sweet Sound Lover's Tongues by Night."

It was a dull, flat, stale, tasteless physical world Francis came back to, after the radiant presence and promise of his uninvited guest. It seemed that all the preceding hours of soaring away from the physical into this other reality was a gradual build-up to this, the "audience" with a "man from beyond mankind". This unusual visitation he would never forget and to experience it again would surely be a goal worthy of his highest endeavors -- but without the necessity of poisoning himself with henbane! He would fane have continued that visit, and left with the visitor. But here he was entombed in the old carcass again. He vaguely felt a wetness on the side of his face.

He vaguely felt a wetness on the side of his face. It was from two sources, Lillibet's tears as she leaned over him, and from the wet cloth with which she was wiping away the dried blood from his face and hair. He opened his eyes a flicker.

"He liveth! He liveth!" Lillibet almost screamed with joy, leaned closer and covered his inert face with kisses.

The little maid offered her another clean wet cloth for her ministrations.

"Go see if Higginbotham hath returned with the apothecary," Lady Hatton said to her.

It was unnecessary. His broad figure appeared in the doorway, alone.

"Mr. Moore will not attend Master Bacon, m'Lady," her butler said in his direct way.

"Well, in heaven's name, why not?"

"He says his bill of over a year's standing hath not been paid, m'Lady." Higginbotham shrugged hopelessly. "He refuseth to come until the arrears are paid up."

"Oh-h-h-h-h-h-h-h, I told him! I told him!" Lady Ann wailed, alternately plucking her skirts and waving her hands as though trying to brush the unpleasant fact away from her as she paced back and forth in the bedroom. "Francis was always careless about money. As God is

my witness the boy received the best of good Christian training. Now this. What are we to do? What are we to do?"

"Beggin' you pardon, m'Lady," said Higginbotham quietly, "gold in the right amount would do the trick."

But Lady Ann Bacon continued her pacing and moaning as though she were more concerned with wallowing in the crisis than solving it. Lady Hatton straightened up from the bed, stared in exasperation from Lady Ann, to the maids, to Higginbotham. She turned to Annie, the little minx.

"Here, take this cloth and try to get the rest of the dried blood out of his hair, without disturbing the wound. Come with me, Higginbotham."

Out in the hall they ran into more domestics, concerned about their beloved Master Francis. Lady Hatton put on a brave front and reassured them that he was ill but alive.

"Will Mr. Moore come if the bill is paid?" she asked Higginbotham anxiously.

"Most assuredly, madam," replied her butler. "I'll be glad to ride in again and fetch him."

"Thank you, Higginbotham, but I'd best go. Perhaps I can impress the good man with our desperate need," and she started precipitately down the hall.

"Mind if I come along, m'Lady?" Higginbotham was right behind her. "It'll save ye time in finding his place."

The hostler was rubbing down Higginbotham's steed when they came outside. The poor beast was winded and trembling with fatigue.

"Sor," the man touched his forelock, "ye canna ride this'n back to Lunnon?"

"No, we're not riding to London!" Lady Hatton replied angrily for him. "Your master's at death's door and someone must get to St. Albans for a doctor."

The man was not to be denied.

"Beggin' yer pardon, yer Grace, we ha' a fresh 'un at stable for Mr. Higginbotham, Master Anthony's Cerberus."

Lillibet impatiently agreed and belied her own depleted condition by mounting briskly when Higginbotham gave her a foot up. She set off immediately for the stables at a brisk trot and Higginbotham came along behind on his winded mount, with the hostler running a poor third behind.

Cerberus was still saddled and such was Lillibet's impatience to be off that she would not wait for the stirrup length to be adjusted. But Higginbotham's shorter legs managed to reach them and he spurred off on the huge black to catch up with Lillibet's fleet piebald. Then it was trot, rack, canter and gallop in to St. Albans and the apothecary shop. It was on the near side of the town but even so it was most of three miles in. After the long ride out from London that morning there was no pleasure in it for horses or riders.

The comings and goings of this strange pair from London had been well noted earlier in the sleepy hamlet and when the two rode post haste up to the doctor's door there was a gathering of the curious.

Lillibet dismounted without awaiting Higginbotham's assistance, handed her reins to an eager and open-mouthed lad and pushed on into the shop without awaiting an answer to her peremptory knock. Behind the counter was a nondescript figure of a man, medium build, straggly red and gray hair and beard, and gold-rimmed spectacles set well down on his nose. When Lillibet came up to his counter he showed no surprise whatsoever, as though ladies were a commonplace in St. Albans. He tilted his head forward and looked over his spectacles at her with quizzical, watery blue eyes.

"Thou art Mr. Moore, the apothecary?" she asked in some puzzlement.

"Yus," came the reply in a thick local dialect.

"And didst thou refuse to come to Gorhambury to attend Mr. Bacon?" she asked accusingly.

"Yus," came the deliberate reply without so much as the blink of an eye. "From him not one groat for last time."

"And how long ago was that, my good man?"

The good man turned to the crowded desk behind the counter, picked up a spindle of papers and leafed slowly and deliberately through it. Now he was looking through his glasses. He turned to her again.

"Eleven month, ten days an' nine hours, ma'am," as he turned back to set the spindle down.

Lillibet curbed her impatience with an icy calm.

"Wait, good doctor, how much is it?"

"One mark, four shillings and five pence."

"If the bill is paid now, wilt thou come immediately, Mr. Moore? The master of Gorhambury is dying."

"Yus?" He set the spindle down, his composure noticeably disturbed for once, and turned back to Lillibet and stared over his glasses.

"Attempted murder, it seems -- last night!" She opened her purse and counted the money out on the counter.

"Mr. Bacon has a nasty gash on the head," observed Higginbotham.

"No, no no," Moore shook his head in disbelief. "Master Bacon had no enemy in the world. Everybody luffed him."

"Will you hurry," urged Lady Hatton, "I'll pay you double for your time and trouble. Do you have a horse?"

"No," replied the apothecary as he pulled a black bag out of the clutter of a back corner of the shop, peered briefly into it, closed it, walked to a back door covered with a hanging and shouted something unintelligible through it to whomever was in the rear. Without awaiting a reply he headed, not too slowly, for the shop door. "We go to the stable."

"More valuable time lost," said Lillibet in exasperation as she followed the apothecary out, with Higginbotham holding the shop door for them, "and poor Francis dying for want of proper attention!"

A knot of curious villagers had gathered now and they formed an eager audience as the desperate Lady Hatton grasped the apothecary's arm.

"Mr. Moore, for God's sake -- and for the sake of Mr. Bacon -- wilt thou save time and ride double with my man here?"

"Yus?" replied Moore,, more in a surprised question than an affirmative reply,

"Up with you, Higginbotham," she shoved Mr. Moore firmly toward Cerberus, "I'll mount myself, thank you."

A flurry of petticoats gave the villagers much more of a show than they bargained for and, revealing a length of pretty white leg which left them open-mouthed, she was on the piebald in a trice. While Higginbotham mounted she tossed a pence or two to the boy who had held their horses. Her butler grasped the startled and protesting apothecary, swung him easily up on the mighty Cerberus, and all were off at a gallop.

On the way back to Gorhambury only two events were of any moment, the postman was just leaving the place and a country youth, riding a bony nag, was loping up the drive. On an impulse Lillibet reined in to learn his purpose but waved Higginbotham and the apothecary on to the manse with all haste. The youth had a message for Mr. Francis Bacon. Lady Hatton told him the master of Gorhambury was desperately ill, that she would see to it that the message was delivered. She gave him a generous tip for his trouble, and sent him happily on his way.

Consumed with desperate curiosity, she opened the simply folded note, it wasn't sealed, to find a cryptic, rhymed quatrain:

"The Earl hath gi'en a thousand poun'
To hire away the Stratford clown.
We haste to send him on his way,
Over the ditch for many a day."

Hal

She hastened on up to Francis' room, there to find more calm than when she left. Her lover was sitting up in bed. There was still a far away, other-worldly look in his eye but he gave her a wan smile and nod of recognition. Mr. Moore was cutting away the hair around the head wound before cleaning it and bandaging it.

Higginbotham and Lady Ann were in the room but the apothecary had apparently ordered the domestics out. She would have mentioned the note then but Moore's attentions were causing Francis some pain and she didn't want to interfere right then with the completion of the task. But a remark about the wound itself might be appropriate.

"Nasty gash, isn't it, doctor?"

"Yus," he replied shortly.

"Could'st thou name the weapon that caused it?"

Lady Ann's fluttering hands waved even more distractedly as Lady Hatton brought up the possibility of attempted murder.

"No weapon, m'Lady," he replied slowly and deliberately as he worked, "a fall on de head."

"Francis, you dont have to talk if you dont feel like it, dear," she said to him, "Was it a fall from Cerberus this morning as you rode from London, or wert thou waylaid by some highwayman?"

"Would it had been the latter and that he finished the job," replied Francis, barely above a whisper in a most woebegone fashion.

"Francis!" exclaimed Lillibet.

"Oh my heavenly days, the Saints preserve us," moaned Lady Ann, wringing her hands.

"No. Cerberus stumbled in the dark and I went headlong."

Telling this truth Francis' voice was even lower and his eyes downcast in utter dejection, except as Moore's cleansing medicine stung him to greater physical awareness. Now why should he tell them of his attempted suicide? He was just grateful for the superficial head wound as a cover for the real cause of his physical condition. The fearful and oppressive reasons for taking the poison were still there, like grinning spectres, threatening eventually to consume him. Where to go? What to do? Surrounded by a crew of helpless women, and so weak and exhausted he could scarcely look into the morrow, let

let alone the present. However, he wanted no more of those out-of-the-body experiences. When the surges of fire came from below they were weaker now and he resisted them successfully. He had had enough of escapes. It seemed better somehow to hold on to the flesh in full consciousness and look squarely at the situation, whatever it might be. Perhaps a solution was possible as his mysterious visitor had suggested.

"Art thou hungry, Master Bacon?" asked Mr. Moore.

Francis shook his head. The thought of food was farthest from his mind. There certainly was no desire for it. But the good apothecary was wiser in the ways of men. He looked directly at Lady Ann.

"Soup."

Given something tangible and readily within her means to do, Lady Ann hustled out to order up some nourishment for her favorite "son". She even stopped wringing her hands.

"The poor dear hasn't had a thing to eat since yesterday," said Lillibet to Moore and sat down on the edge of the bed again, placing her bandaged hand tenderly on Francis. The cloth wrappings were loose and dirty from her long day in the saddle, and her healing fingers itched and ached. She turned to Higginbotham standing quietly and watchfully by the door.

"We dont need thee for the time being. Thou art tired and hungry, I know. Get thee downstairs and rest thyself."

"Thank you, m'Lady," said Higginbotham, and with a respectful bow he withdrew.

"Thou must be tired and hungry, too," said Francis slowly. He assayed a wan smile and gestured toward her injured hand. "It wants a fresh bandage, Mr. Moore, wilt thou see to it now?"

"Yus," replied the apothecary, "yus indeed!"

While Lillibet slumped back gratefully against the headboard and heaved her first sigh of relaxation in hours, Moore turned his attention on her trouble. Scissors snipped away and dirty outer wrappings were removed to reveal the expert splinting of Dr. Bright, two days before.

"Good work," observed Moore approvingly as his fingers pressed firmly along the bindings.

She winced slightly at the pain but said nothing. Francis lifted a hand to put on her arm, another indication that he was returning a little to normal. He noticed the folded paper, still held in her good hand.

"For me?" he asked, pointing to it.

"Of course, how stupid of me!" she exclaimed. "A messenger brought it just as we rode up the drive coming back from St. Albans with Mr. Moore."

Francis still felt remote from the physical world as he unfolded the note. He read and re-read, and re-read, searching dully for the significance of the rhymed lines before him. Gradually realization came and the prophecy of the mysterious visitor only a short time before took on reality. He was safe! The Earl of Southampton had come through with a thousand pounds to buy Will Shakespeare's silence. Harry Percy was on his way to Stratford now. For that kind of money the actor-manager of Lord Chamberlain's company would go to the end of the earth; and all that would be asked of him was to cross the Channel, the ditch, and stay out of sight and reach of the Queen's men until this thing blew over.

"Good news?" asked Lillibet, and then as she saw the smile of relief cross Francis' face, "It is good news. I should have known it. We are safe, safe!"

It was awkward, with the apothecary holding and rebandaging her left hand, but she put her good hand and arm around Francis' neck and kissed him. The reaction from the Puritan Mr. Moore was immediate.

"All the Saints and Joseph!" he exclaimed and got up and left the room, too embarrassed to complete the job.

The two lovers laughed.

"Here, I'll finish it," said Francis, "it only needs to be tied."

"But art the one who is sick," protested Lillibet. "Does that note mean what I hope it means?"

"From Harry Percy," said Francis in a low voice as he tied her bandage. "My good man is on his way with enough to assure Will's absence from the country for months."

"Oh, Francis!" She kissed him again and again.

His nerves still poison-dulled by the henbane, Francis didn't feel quite the fiery response to her presence as in the previous two days; but he knew enough to respond by putting his arms around her and embracing her.

"Last night seemeth like a horrible dream," she murmured, "God hath been good. My prayers for your safety are answered."

"If Harry Percy rideth straightaway to Stratford, and if he and Will succeed in eluding Her Majesty's men on their way to the Cinque Ports. We can then be thankful," observed Francis quietly, "but they will."

There was an unnecessarily loud knock at the partially open door;

but Lady Ann didn't wait to be bidden to enter; she stalked determinedly in bearing a tray with a bowl of soup, toasted muffins and jelly. On it also was a sealed letter. Behind her was Mr. Moore. She could have approached Francis from the other side of the bed but she came right up to where Lillibet was sitting.

"Here, son, this'll put some strength in ye!"

Rather than be elbowed out of the way, Lillibet got up quickly -- after all, Lady Ann was mistress of the house -- and moved away. To relieve the tension she asked Mr. Moore to finish checking the wrapping on her hand.

"Canst thou tell me how long I must wear this awful thing, doctor?"

"When did it happen?"

"Two days ago."

"Well, by me it should stay on a week at least -- better yet two weeks." He held her bandaged hand gently in his, with the other over it in a carressing, healing gesture. "Thou knowest, m'Lady, nature takes her time. Give her a chance."

He turned back to Francis and felt his brow.

"No fever here. Ye may suffer a perturbation of the brain for a few days, Master Bacon. I'd advise ye to lay off the books yer readin' and studyin' 'til all ungodly hours o' the night. Ye're sound o' wind and limb otherwise. Rest 'ul do the trick. Well, I must go, and return the morrow."

But Mr. Moore didn't seen exactly eager to leave. Lady Hatton sensed what was holding him back and went for her purse.

"Quite unnecessary!" exclaimed Lady Ann sharply and jumped up so suddenly from beside Francis on the bed that she almost upset his soup. "I'll pay for the charge for his services and I'll see that he gets back to St. Albans!"

"Thank you, Mr. Moore," called Lady Hatton after him as the two left the room. With the smile of a successful conspirator she hurried back to Francis' side, offering to feed him herself with her good hand. After a few attempts to ladle soup into him, he laughed at her concern and gently took the spoon away from her.

"Please, dear, I'd rather do it myself. Why dont ye butter up a muffin or two. Thou'rt hungry, I know."

This she did but offered to share the first one with him. Francis dutifully took a bite as she held it to his mouth and he tried to bite her finger as well. She jerked the muffin back with a mock cry of alarm, but snuggled closer to him herself. At the next bite of muf-

fin, crumbs fell down onto his chest and into the bedsheet.

"I can help," offered Lillibet, and without awaiting Francis' approval, slid a carressing hand along his side to find the errant crumbs. Much as he might have enjoyed this play, he was too responsive to contain himself and -- for a supposed sick man -- gave a surprising lurch away from her tickling fingers.

"Lillibet, please!" he gasped.

"I was only trying to be helpful, Francis," she protested in all innocence.

Then Lady Ann returned, without knocking this time, and approached the bed so determinedly that Lillibet got up and moved away again. She couldn't pick up the spoon to feed Francis because he was doing that himself, but she did spy the still unopened letter on the tray.

"Thou hast not touched thy mail!" Lady Ann said reapprovingly, and picked it up for a look at the handwriting. Outside of Francis' name and address, there was nothing there to indicate where it was from nor whom. She peered closely at the writing.

"Dont recognize it. Dont recognize it at all. Doesn't <u>smell</u> like the City -- salt air."

Francis gently removed it from her grasp, "Mother, please," broke the sealing wax and the ties and opened it. "It's from Michael Stanhope. He writes from Ipswich."

A quick glance at the contents revealed that it was nothing secret so he read it aloud:

"Mr. Bacon: We are moved greatly at this time, hoping not to disturb thy felicity at Gorhambury, the which we would share with thee if circumstances here were other than they are. It is commonly bruited hereabouts that Her Majesty entertaineth a new Parliament before the year is up and the good citizens of Ipswich, casting about for the ablest gentleman to represent them -- along with my humble self -- could only agree on Francis Bacon. Thou stouldst for Middlesex in the great Parliament of '93, but championed the common cause in easying the ruinous tax burden proposed by the Lords. We would deem it the greatest of honors if thou wouldst stand with me for Ipswich in Commons.

Your humble servant,
Michael Stanhope"

Francis dropped his hand and the letter slowly, gazing far off into the distance. The mysterious visitor was right again. He was needed. His work would go on!

"Surely ye will not sit with the rabble of the Commons again,"

came from Lady Ann harshly. "Wouldst thou fortune the Queen's displeasure once more, the Tower and the block might be thy destiny."

"If the rights of the people call for defense which meriteth the ill will of her Majesty, so be it. I will not shirk my duty for the heart and body of England," replied Francis firmly, but he fingered his bandaged head.

"Surely that will heal before Parliament sits," laughed Lillibet to release the tension. "I think this calls for a celebration, this invitation from Mr. Stanhope. Nay, a feast! I'm hungry and soup and muffins will scarcely serve to allay the pangs of this day-long fast!"

"Bridget!" Francis raised his voice to summon a maid, and to Lillibet, "we'll toast this new honor in new wine. Mother, will you join us?"

With a snort of half-approval she gathered her skirt and headed for the door. "Bridget's below stairs, I'm afraid, but we can scare up a bottle of Claret some place. If ye must drink, this is as good excuse as any."

Suddenly, Lillibet felt tired too, as well as hungry, and she slumped down into Francis' big, easy chair, stretching her legs manlike before her.

"Thou hast been a great care to me, Mr. Bacon, this long, long day. Methinks I've aged and wrinkled my face. D'ye suppose I could withdraw and repair the damage before we sup?"

Francis was all apologies as he tried again to call help and finally did rouse Annie to take Lillibet to a room where she could freshen up and relax a bit from that long day, much of it in the saddle. Francis insisted that she return to his room, however, and prevailed on Lady Ann to have their supper served there. The sun had set and they were in the long twilight of English summer before arrangements were complete for the three of them.

Trays of steaming viands were brought in, a joint of mutton, fresh vegetables and fruit from the extensive gardens, and to drink there was sack and that new Claret. Several toasts were drunk, to Francis' health, to the Queen, to his successful election as representative from Ipswich. This latter drew little enthusiasm from Lady Ann Bacon and Lady Hatton called her on it.

"Surely thou wish thy son well in his public career!"

"Aye," she said drily, "if he doesn't lose his head opposing her Majesty and her Majesty's ministers! That disgraceful performance of '93 is still the embarrassment of the family."

"Subsidies come from the people," replied Francis. "They should have <u>some</u> voice in when the tax is collected and <u>how</u> it is spent."

Lady Ann put her glass down firmly.

"Commons should mind their betters, do as they're told and go home. Her Majesty rules this land, as it should be."

"With the advice and consent of free men, as it should be," added Francis just as firmly.

"Otherwise, many would suffer in silence," said Lillibet, putting down her glass and passing her good hand over that splint-bound finger. Seeing that this was lost on Lady Ann she pressed on. "Thinkest thou her Majesty is the spotless, blameless, virgin Queen she pretends to be? Pah!"

Lillibet almost spat in disgust as she turned to her food. Francis shook his head slightly and tried to change the subject but Lady Ann shot back.

"How dare thou speak lightly of Queen Elizabeth, the fairest monarch that ever blessed this Isle?"

"How dare she do this to me?" retorted Lillibet and almost jammed her broken finger into Lady Ann's nose.

Startled into temporary speechlessness, the good lady jerked back and looked at Francis for denial, or confirmation.

"I'm afraid 'tis true, mother. I was at Greenwich the other night when it happened," he nodded his head slowly.

"Wouldst like to hear the intimate details of my initiation in the Queen's boudoir?" continued Lillibet, still angry and now in tears. "And the scandal on every tongue in London? Methinks England's fair Queen is in need of restraint and I pray this new Parliament teaches her a good lesson!"

Realizing that she had said perhaps too much, and to her lover's foster mother, she turned to her food. She was hungry. But victory was hers already; for this unanswerable, unresolvable problem of unswerving loyalty to her Majesty, in the face of the old jade's undeniable despotism and corruption, had already cracked the foundation's of Lady Ann's splendid mind, and Puritan morals. The sharp-tongued, strong-willed woman of a moment before drfted off into a vague, pointless creature of waving hands and indeterminate, meaningless phrases.

Francis called Bridget to come and lead his mother unprotesting to her room.

"This hath been coming on since my disgrace after the Parliament of '93," said Francis sadly. "Slowly but surely she breaketh against the tides of change. I cannot alter my course. She will not yield to the times." He shrugged his shoulders helplessly and assayed to

eat the inviting food before them. It was practically tasteless to him but he forced himself to take nourishment which he knew his body needed. Lillibet stuffed herself joyfully as would any hungry nineteen year old after a strenuous day, doing justice to the produce of Gorhambury's famous gardens and meadows, now touched with the silver light of the moon.

Annie cleared the supper things away and the tired, happy lovers turned from the soft candle light within to the softer, more mysterious moonlight veiling the gardens without. They stood at the window of his bedroom and looked out, locked in their own mystery, the magnetic pull of young bodies vibrant with life. Francis finally broke the spell.

"Was it only two nights ago, we looked out upon the Queen's gardens at Greenwich?"

"Or was it an age," breathed Lillibet softly. Then she picked up those deathless lines of Romeo. "How silver-sweet sound lover's tongues by night. Like softest music to attending ears!"

"Lillibet."

"My dear?"

"At what o'clock tomorrow shall I send to thee?"

"At the hour of nine," she replied.

"I will not fail," replied Francis with a sigh, "'tis twenty years til then," and continued with Juliet's lines, "I have forgot why I called thee back."

"I shall forget, to have thee still stand here, remembering how I love thy company," she said.

"And I'll still stay, to have thee still forget! Forgetting any other home but this," replied Francis and he freed one hand from their embrace to gesture toward the broad, moonlit gardens beneath them. Lillibet continued.

"'Tis almost morning; I would have thee gone: and yet no further than a wanton's bird;

> Who lets it hop a little from her hand,
> Like a poor prisoner in his twisted gyves,
> And with a silk thread plucks it back again,
> So jealous loving of its liberty."

"I would I were thy bird," said Francis.

"Sweet, so would I," replied Lillibet, "yet I would kill

Thee with much cherishing.
Good night, good night! Parting is such sweet sorrow
That I shall say good night till it be morrow."

"Sleep dwell upon thine eyes, peace in thy breast --
Would I were sleep and peace, so sweet to rest!"

Finis.