

# The Rebel Maid

## THE STORY OF THE PLAY

The story opens three days before the landing of William of Orange at Torbay, namely on November 2nd, 1688. Sir Stephen Crespigny had just been appointed Royal Commissioner for the suppression of a strongly suspected anti-Stuart plot, so in honour of the event his uncle, Lord Milverton, who is Lord Lieutenant of the County, and also a supporter of James II, invites a number of adherents to the Stuart cause to meet his nephew. Among the guests is Lady Mary Trefusis, the rich owner of a neighbouring estate, whom Sir Stephen has wooed on many occasions but without success. Lady Mary has long ago given her heart to Lord Milverton's son, Derek, whom she has known from childhood, but who for three years has been abroad. Moreover, she is opposed to the Stuart cause, and has long been secretly working on behalf of William, along with the fisherfolk, to whom she is known as "Snow Bunting". At the very moment of Lord Milverton's party she is anxiously awaiting a letter of instructions regarding the landing of William and his supporters.

While the festivities are at their height Derek unexpectedly arrives home in his cutter, the *Curlew*. Lady Mary is delighted to see him and, strongly suspecting that he, like herself, is on the side of William, tries to gain his confidence. She is correct in her suspicions, but Derek, true to his pledge of secrecy, is determined not to give himself away even to his sweetheart. As a matter of fact he is the writer of the very letter she is expecting, but he does not for one moment associate her with the "Snow Bunting" he is in correspondence with. Sir Stephen also suspects Derek of being an enemy to the Stuart cause, and by his appointment as Royal Commissioner he is hoping to secure sufficient proof to justify him in exposing his rival as an enemy to the cause of King James. In that case he is confident that he will succeed Derek not only as heir to Lord Milverton, but also as successful suitor for the hand of Lady Mary.

The fates, it would appear, are on the side of Sir Stephen, for he manages to intercept the letter that Lady Mary is expecting. It reads as follows, and gives the key to the whole plot: "Commander of cutter *Curlew* to 'Snow Bunting.' If coast is clear show green light on Thursday at ten. If there's danger show red signal." On the fateful night Lady Mary pretends to have sprained her ankle by a fall from her horse, and makes that the excuse for staying overnight at "The Jolly Fishermen," an inn overlooking Torbay, which is used as a rendezvous by those who are assisting in the landing of William. Sir Stephen and his men naturally find their way to the same inn.

At the appointed hour Lady Mary exhibits a red lantern as a signal that troops are about, but directly she is out of the way Sir Stephen changes the red light for a green one. Thus Derek and his landing party, thinking the coast is clear, come ashore only to be immediately arrested. Lady Mary is dumbfounded when she finds the *Curlew* party have come ashore in spite of her warning. But at a signal from her, a band of fishermen, strong supporters of William, make their way into the inn by means of a secret passage, overpower the soldiers, and help Derek to make good his escape. Sir Stephen is satisfied, however, that he has got sufficient evidence to condemn Derek in the eyes of his father, and he goes, hot foot, with his news. At the same time he tries to make a bargain that he will save Lady Mary at the price of her hand. But Lord Milverton has realized something of the treachery of his nephew, and will be no party to the bargain, and he immediately forsakes the Stuart cause.

Shortly afterwards William of Orange arrives on the scene and the tables are turned on Sir Stephen. Lady Mary gets her revenge by craving a pardon for him on condition that he marries her aunt, Lady Elizabeth Weston. As it means that or death, Sir Stephen accepts his fate and marries a woman of uncertain age, who has long been searching for a husband.

Lady Mary, in reply to the congratulations of William of Orange on her narrow escape, retorts, "The Rebel Maid is never captured, sire, but"- turning to Derek -" she surrenders."