

**THE LAST DAYS OF MARY  
STUART. A NOVEL, IN  
THREE VOLUMES. VOL. III**

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The last days of Mary Stuart. A novel, in three volumes. Vol. III by Emily Finch

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**EMILY FINCH**

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THE LAST DAYS  
OF  
MARY STUART.

A NOVEL,

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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THE  
LAST DAYS OF MARY STUART.

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CHAPTER I.

THE advice given by Essex to his friend Tracy respecting Mary Leslie was remembered, and acted upon; the chance of his destined bride allowing her affections to be engaged by another, brought hope and consolation; and hence arose the ardent strain in which his letter was couched, urging her to lose no time in placing herself under the care of those sent to convey her to England, and testifying the most lively impatience for her arrival.

The voyage was a speedy one, and as the vessel moored in the river, Mary Leslie found herself claimed by the occupants of a barge that neared it. After a few brief questions from the captain, which were satisfactorily replied to by the bargemen, she entered the barge, which immediately stood towards a gloomy looking building, pointed out to her as the residence of Lady Tracy. The active mind of the Scottish maiden was presently engaged depicting the face, form, and manners of the old lady to whom she was about to be introduced, and it is probable the imagination, as is usual in such cases, had drawn a tolerably vivid picture of the venerable old lady; but in this instance, at least, imagination fell far short of reality, and as Mary Leslie entered a gloomy apartment, catching, as she did so, a glimpse of her future mother-in-law, who, seated in a high backed chair, looked like some grave automaton, decked in a ruff, preposterous even in those days of lawn and



starch, she shrank back, and would even at that moment have braved the horrors of the pirate's island to be delivered from this abode of silence and rigidity.

A large embroidery frame stood in one corner of the room, by it were ranged two prim looking damsels, formed on the model of their mistress ; their avocation had been suspended by the stranger's arrival, on whom they fixed their unmeaning eyes with a look that froze her. Another inmate of this prison-house claimed the attention of Mary Leslie ; this was a young girl who knelt on a velvet cushion near the feet of Lady Tracy, reading from a richly blazoned missal the life of some holy martyr. Whatever the effect of Mary Leslie's arrival on the other tenants of the chamber, it was a relief to this poor child, who, condemned to maintain the painful position then considered only proper respect from the young and lowly when in the presence of their elders and superiors, had been

reading until her strength was exhausted ; and then too as she raised her fair face to the sweet countenance of Mary, and beheld a being so unlike the cold and rigid ones around her, the warm feelings of childhood, which had been so cruelly repressed, appeared suddenly to expand, and she felt a longing desire to greet the beautiful stranger with a cordial welcome ; but such a movement would, she well knew, deprive her of the protection of the charitable lady who had extended towards the orphan her benevolence, and while from pride Lady Tracy took care her young protégée wanted none of the necessaries of life, it never occurred to her mind, that by the rigid discipline to which she was subjected, the child's days were rendered as wretched as they would have been, had she left her to the miserable fate it was her boast to have rescued her from. Could the rich and proud only feel how much greater happiness they would confer, by entering into the feelings

of the afflicted, than by merely extending to them that pecuniary aid which often relieves the least part of distress, the luxury of causing tears of joy to flow down the cheek of the widow and orphan, would well repay their unwonted exertion.

“ You may approach, young lady,” was the cold salutation that greeted the stranger; “ I was taught to expect you long since, but I presume curiosity prompted you to see a little more of this wicked world before you settled among us: times are changed since I was young, and the liberty now permitted young women will be their destruction.”

“ It was not my wish, my dear madam,” Mary Leslie began, but she was cut short by the harsh voice of the old lady.

“ Well, well, I dare say you know how to excuse yourself, and I permit no unnecessary conversation in my presence; when I am more at leisure I shall learn how far you are skilled