

# Astraea JANE STEEVSON



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~ary 1639<br> is sitting in a great chair under a cloth of estatei¼CE in<br>im hung with black velvet. She is dumpyi¼CE deep-bosomed and<br>~t~l acked as a trooper. Her cheeks are doughy with adversity<br> but her hazel eyes are clear. Dusk is falling outside in the<br>~ti¼CE and in the dimi¼CE candle-lit velvet cavern of the presence<br>ii i<br>~i~t~er her facei¼CE breast and hands shine dimly pale against the black<br>lidi¼CE her and the black of her dress. Of the tall man standing before<br>>i~ in scholar s black broadclothi¼CE nothing can be seen but the<br>~ starched-linen gleam of his collar and cuffs. The hand which<br>tJ his black beaver hat is invisible: as she peers into the gloomi¼CE<br>~ barely discern his facei¼CE let alone his expression. Only a sudden<br>V Bifting in the gloom makes her realizei¼CE with a sudden qualmi¼CE<br>~she has been staring straight into his eyes. She turns her head<br>>i~ settling the black silk scarf around her shoulders against the<br>~g chill of the Dutch winteri¼CE adjusting her rings.<br>~dl me a storyi¼CE she saysi¼CE her eyes downcast. Her voice ~s a strangely<br> one to come from so still and matronly a figure.<br>at story do you wishi¼CE your majesty? he responds. His voice is<br> and resonanti¼CE but huskyi¼CE like the sound of a bell made of wood.<br>~ she does not look at himi¼CE and when she speaks her tone is<br> 1. Are there truly men in Africa

whose heads do grow beneath  
shoulders? ~I have not seen one he says  
gravely. ~I hoped it might be true. There is a phrase  
is there not -  
"ex  
tica semper aliquid novi"? ~It was Pliny  
I believe who said that.  
And perhaps it is true. There

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