

The Reformer

By CHARLES M. SHELTON
Author of "In His Steps," "Robert Hardy's Boy in Day," etc.
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CHAPTER IV. A LESSON IN DANCING.

LAUGHED heartily when Jane told me of the tilt between Brandon and Princess Mary, the latter of whom was in the habit of saying unkind things and being thanked for them.

Brandon was the wrong man to say them to, as Mary learned. He was not hot tempered—in fact, just the reverse—but he was the last man to brook an affront and the quickest to resent in a cool headed, dangerous way an intentional offense.

He respected himself and made others do the same, or seem to do so at least. He had no vanity, which is but an inordinate desire for those qualities that bring self respect and often the result of conscious demerit, but he knew himself and knew that he was entitled to his own good opinion. He was every such a man, strong, intelligent and brave to temerity, with a reckless disregard of consequences, which might have been dangerous had it not been tempered by a dash of prudence and caution that gave him ballast.

I was not surprised when I heard of the encounter, for I knew enough of him to be sure that Mary's high handedness would meet its counterpart in my cool friend Brandon. It was, however, an unfortunate victory, and what all Mary's beauty and brightness would have failed to do her honest, open acknowledgment of wrong, following so quickly upon the heels of her fault, accomplished easily. It drew him within the circle of her fatal attractions, and when Jane told me of it I knew his fate was sealed and that sooner or later his untouched heart and cool head would fall victim to the shafts that so surely winged all others.

It might and probably would be "later," since, as Brandon had said, he was not one of those who wear the



"I met your friend. Did he tell you?" heart upon the sleeve. Then he had that strong vein of prudence and caution which, in view of Mary's unattainableness, would probably come to his help. But never was man's heart strong enough to resist Mary Tudor's smile for long.

There was this difference between Brandon and most others—he would be slow to love, but when love should once fairly take root in his intense nature he would not do to trifle with.

The night after the meeting Mary cuddled up to Jane, who slept with her, and whispered, half bashfully:

"Tell me all about Brandon. I am interested in him. I believe if I knew more persons like him I should be a better girl, notwithstanding he is one of the boldest men I ever knew. He says anything he wishes and, with all his modest manner, is as cool with me as if I were a burgher's daughter. His modesty is all on the outside, but it is pretty, and pretty things must be on the outside to be useful. I wonder if Judson thought him modest."

Jane talked of Brandon to Mary, who was in an excellent humor, until the girls fell asleep.

When Jane told me of this, I became frightened, for the surest way to any woman's heart is to convince her that you make her better and higher in her breast pure impulses and higher aspirations. It would be bad enough should Brandon fall in love with the princess, which was almost sure to happen, but for them to fall in love with each other meant Brandon's head upon the block and Mary's heart bruised, broken and empty for life. Her strong nature, flled to the brim with latent passion, was the stuff of which love makes a conflagration that burns to destruction, and should she learn to love Brandon she would move heaven and earth to possess him.

She whose every desire from childhood up had been gratified, whose every whim seemed to her a paramount necessity, would stop at nothing when the dearest wish of a woman's heart can coin was to be gained or lost. Brandon's element of prudence might help him and might forestall any effort on his part to win her, but Mary had never heard of prudence, and man's caution avails but little when set against woman's daring. In case they both should love they were sure to try for each other and in trying were equally sure to find ruin and desola-

A few evenings after this I met the princess in the queen's drawing room. She beckoned me to her and, resting her elbows on the top of a cabinet, her chin in her hands, said: "I met your friend, Captain Brandon, a day or two ago. Did he tell you?"

"No," I answered. "Jane told me, but he has not mentioned it."

It was true Brandon had not said a word of the matter, and I had not spoken of it either. I wanted to see coming an adventure that would have set most men of the court boasting at a great rate. To have a tilt with the ever victorious Mary and to come off victor was enough, I think, to loosen any tongue less given to bragging than Brandon's.

"So," continued Mary, evidently somewhat piqued, "he did not think his presentation to me a thing worth mentioning? We had a little passage at arms, and, to tell you the truth, I came off second best and had to acknowledge it too. Now, what do you think of this new friend of yours? And he did not boast about having the better of me. After all, there is more virtue in his silence than I at first thought." And she threw back her head and clapped her hands and laughed with the most contagious little ripple you ever heard. She seemed not to grieve over her defeat, but dimpled as though it were a huge joke, the thought of which rather pleased her than otherwise. Victory had grown stale for her, although so young.

"What do I think of my new friend?" I repeated after her, and that gave me a theme upon which I could enlarge eloquently. I told her of his learning, notwithstanding the fact that he had been in the continental wars ever since he was a boy. I repeated to her stories of his daring and bravery that had been told to me by his uncle, the master of the horse, and others, and then I added what I knew Lady Jane had already said. I had expected to be brief, but to my surprise found a close and interested listener, even to the twice told parts, and drew my story out a little, to the liking of us both.

"Your friend has an earnest advocate in you, Sir Edwin," said the princess.

"That he has," I replied. "There is nothing too good to say of him."

I knew that Mary, with her better, clearer brain, held the king almost in the palm of her hand, so I thought to advance Brandon's fortune by a timely word.

"I trust the king will see fit to favor him, and I hope that you will speak a word in his behalf should the opportunity occur."

"What, in the name of heaven, have we to give him?" cried Mary impatiently, for she kept an eye on things political, even if she were only a girl. "The king has given away everything that can be given already, and now that the war is over and men are coming home there are hundreds waiting for more. My father's great treasure is squandered, to say nothing of the money collected from Elmpson, Dudley and the other commissioners. There is nothing to give unless it be the titles and estate of the late Duke of Suffolk. Perhaps the king will give these to your paragon if you will paint him in as fair a light as you have drawn him for me." Then, throwing back her head, with a laugh, "Ask him."

"It would be none too much for his deserts," I replied, falling in with her.

"We will so arrange it, then," went on Mary banteringly. "Captain Brandon no longer, but Charles Brandon, duke of Suffolk. How sounds it, Master Cascode?"

"Sweet in my ears," I replied.

"I really believe you would have the king's crown for him, you absurd man, if you could get it. We must have so interesting a person at court. I shall at least see that he is presented to the queen at once. I wonder if he dances. I suppose not. He has probably been too busy cutting and thrusting." And she laughed again at her own pleasantry.

When the fourth began to gather in her face and the dimples came responsive to her smiles, when she threw back her perfectly poised head, stretching her soft, white throat, so full and round and beautiful, half closing her big brown eyes till they shone again from beneath the shade of those long, black, sweeping lashes; when her red lips parted, showing her teeth of pearl, and she gave the little clap of her hands, a sort of climax to the soft, low, rippling laugh, she made a picture of such exquisite loveliness that it is no wonder men were fools about her and caught love as one catches a contagion.

I had it once, as you already know, and had recovered. All that prevented a daily relapse was my fair, sweet antidote, Jane, whose image rested in my heart, a lasting safeguard.

"I wonder if your prodigy plays cards—that is, such as we ladies play?" asked Mary. "You say he has lived much in France, where the game was invented, but I have no doubt he would soon to waste his time at so frivolous a pursuit when he might be slaughtering armies single handed and alone."

"I do not know as to his dancing and card playing, but I dare venture a wager he does both," I replied, not liking her tone of sarcasm. She had yet to learn who Brandon was.

"I will hazard ten crowns," said Mary quickly, for she loved a wager and was a born gambler.

"Taken," said I.

"We will try him on both tomorrow night in my drawing room," she continued. "You bring him up, but tell no one. I will have Jane there with her lute, which will not frighten you away I know, and we will try his step. I will have cards, too, and we shall see what he can do at triumph."

the eyebrows went up again.

"Oh, you think she doesn't? Well, in truth, Master Brandon, there is one failing that cannot be laid at your door—you are no flatterer." For answer Brandon laughed, and that gave us the cue, and away we went in a rippling chorus, all about nothing. Some persons may call our laughter foolish, but there are others who consider it the height of all wisdom. St. George! I'd give my garter for just one other laugh like that, for just one other hour of youth's dancing blood and glowing soul warmth, of sweet, unconscious, happy heart beat and paradise creating joy in everything!

After a few minutes of gay conversation, in which we all joined, Mary asked: "What shall we do? Will one of you suggest something?"

Jane sat there looking so demure you would have thought mischief could not live within a league of her, but those very demure girls are nearly always dangerous. She said, oh, so innocently: "Would you like to dance? If so, I will play." And she reached for her lute, which was by her side.

"Yes, that will be delightful. Master Brandon, will you dance with me?" asked the princess, with a saucy little laugh, her invitation meaning so much more to three of us than to Brandon. Jane and I joined in the laugh, and when Mary clapped her hands that set Brandon off, too, for he thought it the quaintest, prettiest little gesture in the world and was all unconscious that our laugh was at his expense.

Brandon did not answer Mary's invitation—the fit of laughter had probably put it out of his mind—so she, evidently anxious to win or lose her wager at once, again asked him if he danced.

"Oh, pardon me! Of course! Thank you!" And he was on his feet beside her chair in an instant ready for the dance. This time the girl's laugh, though equally merry, had another tone, for she knew she had lost.

Out they stepped upon the polished floor, he holding her hand in his, awaiting the pause in the music to take the step. I shall never forget the sight of those two standing there together—Mary, dark eyed and glowing; Brandon, almost rosy, with eyes that held the color of a dark spring sky and a wealth of flowing curls crowning his six feet of perfect manhood, strong and vigorous as a young lion. Mary, full of beauty curves and graces, a veritable Venus in her teens, and Brandon, an Apollo, with a touch of Hercules, were a complement each to the other that would surely make a perfect one.

When the music started, off they went, heel and toe, bow and courtesy, a step forward and a step back, in perfect time and rhythm—a poem of human motion. Could Brandon dance? The princess had her answer in the first few steps. Nothing could be more graceful than Brandon's dancing unless it were Mary's. Her slightest movement was grace itself. When she would throw herself backward in thrusting out her toe and then swing forward with her head a little to one side, her uplifted arm undulating like the white neck of a swan—for she was a sight worth a long journey to see. And when she looked up to Brandon with a laugh in her brown eyes and a curving smile just parting her full, red lips that a man would give his very luck to—

—but I had better stop.

"Was there ever a godlier couple?" I asked Jane, by whose side I sat.

"Never," she responded as she played, and, strange to say, I was jealous because she agreed with me. I was jealous because I feared it was Brandon's beauty to which she referred. That I thought would naturally appeal to her. Had he been less handsome I should perhaps have thought nothing of it, but I knew what my feelings were toward Mary, and I judged, or rather misjudged, Jane by myself. I supposed she would think of Brandon as I could not help thinking of Mary. Was anything in heaven or earth ever so beautiful as that royal creature dancing there, daintily holding up her skirts with thumb and first finger, just far enough to show a distracting little foot and ankle and make one wish he had been born a sheep rather than a sentient man who had to live without Mary Tudor? Yet, strange as it may seem, I was really and wholly in love with Jane. In fact, I loved no one but Jane, and my feeling of intense admiration for Mary was but a part of man's composite inconstancy.

A woman—God bless her!—if she really loves a man, has no thought of any other—one at a time is all sufficient—but a man may love one woman with the warmth of a simon and at the same time feel like a good, healthy south wind toward a dozen others. That is the difference between a man and a woman—the difference between the good and the bad. One average woman has enough goodness in her to supply an army of men.

Mary and Brandon went on dancing long after Jane was tired of playing. It was plain to see that the girl was thoroughly enjoying it. They kept up a running fire of small talk and laughter and smiled and bowed and courted, all in perfect time and grace.

It is more difficult than you may think, if you have never tried, to keep up a conversation and dance La Galliard at the same time—one is apt to balk the other. But Brandon's dancing was as easy to him as walking, and, although so small a matter, I could see it raised him vastly in the estimation of both girls.

"Do you play triumph?" I heard Mary ask in the midst of the dancing.

"Oh, yes," replied Brandon, much to my delight, as the princess threw a mischievous, knowing glance over her shoulder to see if I had heard. She at once saw I had, and this, of course, settled the wager.

"And," continued Brandon, "I also play the new game, honor and ruff, which is more interesting than triumph."

"Oh, do you?" cried Mary. "That will more than compensate for the loss of my 10 crowns. Let us sit down at once. I have been wishing to learn, but no one here seems to know it."

France, they say, it is the only game. I suppose there is where you learned it. Perhaps you know their new dances too. I have heard they are delightful."

"Yes, I know them," replied Brandon. "Why, you are a perfect treasure! Teach me at once! How, now, master of the dance? Here is your friend out-doing you in your own line."

"I am glad to hear it," I returned. "If Lady Jane will kindly play some lively air written in the time of 'The Sailor Lass,' I will teach the Lady Mary the new dance," said Brandon.

Jane threw one plump little knee over the other and struck up "The Sailor Lass." After she had adjusted the playing to Brandon's suggestion he stepped deliberately in front of Mary and taking her right hand in his left, encircled her waist with his right arm. The girl was startled at first and drew away. This nettled Brandon a little, and he showed it plainly.

"I thought you wished me to teach you the new dance," he said.

"I do, but—but I did not know it was danced that way," she replied, with a fluttering little laugh, looking up into his face with a half shy, half apologetic manner and then dropping her lashes before his gaze.

"Oh, well," said Brandon, with a Frenchman's shrug of the shoulders, and then moved off as if about to leave the floor.

"But is that really the way you— they dance it—with your— their arm around my—a lady's waist?"

"I should not have dared venture on such a familiarity otherwise," answered Brandon, with a glimmer of a smile playing around his lips and hiding in his eyes.

Mary saw this shadowy smile and said: "Oh, I fear your modesty will cause you hurt. I am beginning to believe you would dare do anything you wish. I more than half suspect you are a very bold man, notwithstanding your smooth, modest manner."

"You do me foul wrong, I assure you. I am the soul of modesty, and grieve that you should think me bold," said Brandon, with a broadening smile.

Mary interrupted him. "Now, I do believe you are laughing at me—at my prudery, I suppose you think it."

Mary would rather have been called a fool than a prude, and I think she was right. Prudery is no more a sign of virtue than a wig is of hair. It is usually put on to hide a bald place.

The princess stood irresolute for a moment in evident hesitation and annoyance.

"You are grieving because I think you bold, and yet you stand there laughing at me to my face. I think so more than ever now. I know it. Oh, you make me angry! Don't! I do not like persons who anger me and then laugh at me." This turned Brandon's smile into a laugh, which he could not hold back.

Mary's eyes shot fire, and she stamped her foot, exclaiming: "Sir, this goes beyond all bounds! I will not tolerate your boldness another moment." I thought she was going to dismiss him, but she did not. The time had come when he or she must be the master.

It was a battle royal between the forces on the floor, and I enjoyed it and felt that Brandon would come out all right.

He said good humoredly: "What! Shall you have all this in your sleeve at my expense? Do you expect to bring me here to win a wager for you made on the assumption of my stupidity and lack of social accomplishments and then complain when it comes my turn to laugh? I think I am the one who should be offended, but you see I am not."

"Cascode, did you tell him?" demanded Mary, evidently referring to the wager.

"He said not a word of it," broke in Brandon, answering for me. "I should have been a dollar indeed not to have seen it myself after what you said about the loss of your 10 crowns. So let us cry quits and begin again."

Mary reluctantly struck her flag.

"Very well, I am willing," she said laughingly; "but, as to your boldness, I still insist upon that. I forgive you, however, this time." Then, half apologetically, "After all, it is not such a grievous charge to make. I believe it never yet injured any man with women. They rather like it, I am afraid, however angry it makes them. Don't they, Jane?"

Jane, of course, did not know, so we all laughed, as usual, upon the slightest pretext, and Mary, that fair bundle of contradictions and quick transitions, stepped boldly up to Brandon, with her colors flying in her cheeks, ready for the first lesson in the new dance.

She was a little frightened at his arm around her waist, for the embrace was new to her—the first touch of man—and was shy and coy, though willing, being determined to learn the dance. She was an apt pupil and soon glided softly and gracefully around the room with unfeigned delight, yielding to the new situation more easily as she became accustomed to it.

This dance was livelier exercise than La Galliard, and Mary could not talk (To be Continued.)

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