

When Knighthood Was In Flower

Or, The Love Story of Charles Brandon and Mary Tudor, the King's Sister.

As told by Sir Edwin Casson's Memoir

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sex toward Mary. It was open, probably in the hope of enticing her with a sight of its contents—a beautiful diamond necklace.

She turned her face ever so little and took it all in with one contemptuous, sneering glance out of the corners of her eyes.

There is a limit to the best of feminine nerve, and at that limit should always be found a flood of beautiful tears.

The king of course was beside himself with rage.

By God's soul, he swore, "she shall marry Louis of France or I will have her whipped to death on the Smithfield pillory!"

Immediately after this, the king, De Longueville and Wolsey set out for London.

I remained behind hoping to see the girls, and after a short time a page plucked me by the sleeve, saying the princess wished to see me.

The page conducted me to the same room in which had been fought the bat-



"There is my answer, sir!"

te with Mary in bed. The door had been placed on its hinges again, but the bed was tumbled as Mary had left it and the room was in great disorder.

"Oh, Sir Edwin," began Mary, "was weeping," "was ever woman in such frightful trouble? My brother is killing me. Can he not see that I could not live through a week of this marriage? And I have been deserted by all my friends, too, excepting Jane. She, poor thing, cannot leave."

"You know I would not go," said Jane parenthetically. Mary continued, "You, too, have been home an entire week and have not been near me."

I began to soften at the sight of her grief and concluded with Brandon that, after all, her beauty could well cover a multitude of sins, perhaps even this, her great transgression against him.

The princess was trying to check her weeping and in a moment took up the thread of her unfinished sentence: "And Master Brandon, too, left without so much as sending me one little word—not a line nor a syllable. He did not come near me, but went off as if I did not care—or he did not. Of course he did not care or he would not have behaved so, knowing I was in so much trouble. I did not see him at all after—one afternoon in the king's—about a week before that awful night in London, except that night, when I was so frightened I could not speak one word of all the things I wished to say."

This sounded strange enough, and I began more than ever to suspect something wrong. I, however, kept as firm a grasp as possible upon the stock of indignation I had brought with me.

"How did you expect to see or hear from him," asked I, "when he was lying in a loathsome dungeon without one ray of light, condemned to be hanged, drawn and quartered because of your selfish neglect to save him who at the cost of half his blood and almost his life had saved so much for you?"

Her eyes grew big, and the tears were checked by genuine surprise.

I continued: "Lady Mary, no one could have made me believe that you would stand back and let the man to whom you owed so great a debt lie so long in such misery and be condemned to such a death for the act that saved

you. I could never have believed it!" "Imp of hell!" screamed Mary. "What tale is this you bring to torture me? Have I not enough already? Tell me it is a lie or I will have your miserable little tongue torn out by the root!"

"It is no lie, princess, but an awful truth and a frightful shame to you." I was determined to tell her all and let her see herself as she was.

She gave a hysterical laugh and, throwing up her hands with her accustomed little gesture, fell upon the bed in utter abandonment, shaking as with a spasm. She did not weep; she could not; she was past that now. Jane went over to the bed and tried to soothe her.

In a moment Mary sprang to her feet, exclaiming: "Master Brandon condemned to death, and you and I here talking and moaning and weeping! Come, come; we will go to the king at once. We will start to walk, Edwin—I must be doing something—and Jane can follow with the horses and overtake us. No; I will not dress; just as I am; this will do. Bring me a hat, Jane—any one, any one." While putting on hat and gloves she continued: "I will see the king at once and tell him all—all! I will do anything. I will marry that old king of France or forty kings or forty devils! It's all one to me. Anything, anything, to save him! Oh, to think that he has been in that dungeon all this time!" And the tears came unheeded in a deluge.

She was under such headway and spoke and moved so rapidly that I could not stop her until she was nearly ready to go; then I held her by the arm while I said:

"It is not necessary now. You are too late."

A look of horror came into her face, and I continued slowly: "I procured Brandon's release nearly a week ago. I did what you should have done, and he is now at our rooms in Greenwich."

Mary looked at me a moment and, turning pale, pressed her hands to her heart and leaned against the door frame.

After a short silence she said: "Edwin Cascodeen—fool! Why could you not have told me that at first? I thought my brain would burn and my heart burst."

"I should have told you had you given me time. As to the pain it gave you"—this was the last charge to my large magazine of indignation—"I care very little about that. You deserve it. I do not know what explanation you have to offer, but nothing can excuse you. An explanation, however good, would have been little comfort to you had Brandon failed you in Billingsgate that night."

She had fallen into a chair by this time and sat in reverie, staring at nothing. Then the tears came again, but more softly.

"You are right; nothing can excuse me. I am the most selfish, ungrateful, guilty creature ever born. A whole month in that dungeon!" And she covered her drooping face with her hands.

"Go away for awhile, Edwin, and then return. We shall want to see you again," said Jane.

Upon my return Mary was more composed. Jane had dressed her hair, and she was sitting on the bed in her riding habit, hat in hand. Her fingers were nervously toying at the ribbons and her eyes cast down.

"You are surely right, Sir Edwin. I have no excuse. I can have none, but I will tell you how it was. You remember the day you left me in the waiting room of the king's council, when they were discussing my marriage without one thought of me, as if I were but a slave or a dumb brute that could not feel?" She began to weep a little, but soon recovered herself.

"While waiting for you to return the Duke of Buckingham came in. I knew Henry was trying to sell me to the French king, and my heart was full of trouble—from more causes than you can know. All the council, especially that butcher's son, were urging him on, and Henry himself was anxious that the marriage should be brought about. He thought it would strengthen him for the imperial crown. He wants everything and is ambitious to be emperor. Emperor! He would cut a pretty figure! I hoped, though, I should be able to induce him not to sacrifice me to his selfish interests, as I have done before, but I knew only too well it would tax my powers to the utmost this time. I knew that if I did anything to anger or to antagonize him it would be all at an end with me. You know he is so exacting with other people's conduct for one who is so careless of his own—so virtuous by proxy. You remember how cruelly he disgraced and crushed poor Lady Chesterfield, who was in such trouble about her husband and who went to Grouche's house to learn if he were true to her. Henry seems to be particularly sensitive in that direction. One would think it was in the commandments, 'Thou shalt not go to Grouche's.'"

"Well, I knew I could do nothing with Henry if he once learned of that visit, especially as it resulted so fatally. Oh, why did I go? Why did I go? That was why I hesitated to tell Henry at once. I was hoping some other way would open whereby I might save Charles—Master Brandon. While I was waiting along came the Duke of Buckingham, and as I knew he was popular in London and had almost as much influence there as the king a thought came to me that he might help us."

"I knew that he and Master Brandon had passed a few angry words at one time in my ballroom—you remember—but I also knew that the duke was in love with you, you know, or pretended to be—he always said he was—and I felt sure I could by a little flattery induce him to do anything. He was always protesting that he would give

half his blood to serve me. As if anybody wanted a drop of his wretched blood. Poor Master Brandon! His blood!"—and tears came, choking her words for the moment. "So I told the duke I had promised you and Jane to procure Master Brandon's liberty, and asked him to do it for me. He gladly consented and gave me his knightly word that it should be attended to without an hour's delay. He said it might have to be done secretly in the way of an escape—not officially—as the Londoners were very jealous of their rights and much aroused on account of the killing. Especially, he said, that at that time great caution must be used, as the king was anxious to conciliate the city in order to procure a loan for some purpose—my dowry, I suppose."

"The duke said it should be as I wished; that Master Brandon should escape and remain away from London for a few weeks until the king procured his loan and then be freed by royal proclamation."

When we arrived at the palace the girls went to their apartments and I to mine, where I found Brandon reading. There was only one window to our common room—a dormer window set into the roof and reached by a little passage as broad as the window itself and perhaps a yard and a half long. In the alcove thus formed was a bench along the wall, cushioned by Brandon's great campaign cloak. In this window we often sat and read, and here was Brandon with his book. I had intended to tell him the girls were coming, for when Mary asked me if I thought he would come to her at the palace, and when I had again said no, she reiterated her intention of going to him at once; but my courage failed me and I did not speak of it.

I knew that Mary ought not to come to our room, and that if news of it should reach the king's ears there would be more and worse trouble than ever, and as usual Brandon would pay the penalty for all. Then again, if it were discovered it might seriously compromise both Mary and Jane, as the world is full of people who would rather say and believe an evil thing of another than to say their prayers or to believe the holy creed.

I had said as much to the Lady Mary when she expressed her determination to go to Brandon. She had been in the wrong so much of late that she was humbled, and I was brave enough to say whatever I felt, but she said she had thought it all over, and as every one was away from Greenwich it would not be found out if I done secretly.

She told Jane she need not go; that she, Mary, did not want to take any risk of compromising her.

Jane would have gone, though, had she known that all her fair name would go with her. She was right, you see, when she told me while riding over to Windsor that should Mary's love blossom into a full blown passion she would wreck everything and everybody, including herself perhaps, to attain the object of so great a desire.

It looked now as if she were on the highroad to that end. Nothing short of chains and fetters could have kept her from going to Brandon that evening. There was an inherent force about her that was irresistible and swept everything before it.

In our garret she was to meet another will, stronger and infinitely better controlled than her own, and I did not know how it would all turn out.

loan of 500,000 crowns for Mary's dowry, the only business of state in which at that time he took any active interest. Subsequently, as you know, he became interested in the divorce laws and the various methods whereby a man, especially a king, might rid himself of a distasteful wife, and after he saw the truth in Anne Boleyn's eyes he adopted a combined policy of church and state craft that has brought us a deal of senseless trouble ever since and is like to keep it up.

As to Mary's dowry, Henry was to pay Louis only 400,000 crowns, but he made the marriage an excuse for an extra 100,000 to be devoted to his own private use.

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CHAPTER XIII. ATONEMENT.

I HAD not been long in the room when a knock at the door announced the girls. I admitted them, and Mary walked to the middle of the floor. It was just growing dark, and the room was quite dim, save at the window where Brandon sat reading. Gods, those were exciting moments! My heart beat like a woman's. Brandon saw the girls when they entered, but never so much as looked up from his book. You must remember he had a great grievance. Jane and I had remained near the door, and poor Mary was a pitiable princess, standing there so full of doubt in the middle of the room. After a moment she stepped toward the window and, with quick coming breath, stopped at the threshold of the little passage.

"Master Brandon, I have come, not to make excuses, for nothing can excuse me, but to tell you how it all happened—by trusting to another."

Brandon arose and, marking the place in his book with his finger, followed Mary, who had stepped backward into the room.

"Your highness is very gracious and kind thus to honor me, but as our ways will hereafter lie as far apart as the world is broad, I think it would have been far better had you refrained from so imprudent a visit, especially as anything one so exalted as yourself may have to say can be no affair of such as I—one just free of the hangman's noose."

"Oh, don't, I pray you! Let me tell you, and it may make a difference. It must pain you, I know, to think of me as you do, after—after—you know; after what has passed between us."

"Yes, that only makes it all the harder. If you could give your kisses—and she blushed red as blood—"to one for whom you care so little that you could leave him to die like a dog, when a word from you would have saved him, what reason have I to suppose they are not for every man?"

This gave Mary an opening of which she was quick enough to take advantage, for Brandon was in the wrong.

"You know that is not true. You are not honest with me nor with yourself, and that is not like you. You know that no other man ever had, or could have, any favor from me, even the slightest. Wantonness is not among my thousand faults. It is not that which angers you. You are sure enough of me in that respect. In truth, I had almost come to believe you were too sure, that I had grown cheap in your eyes, and you did not care so much as I thought and hoped for what I had to give, for after that day you came not near me at all. I know it was the part of wisdom and prudence that you should remain away, but had you cared as much as I your prudence would not have held you."

She hung her head a moment in silence, then, looking at him, almost ready for tears, continued: "A man has no right to speak in that way of a woman whose little favors he has taken, and make her regret that she has given

a gift only that it may recall upon her. 'Little, did I say? Sir, do you know what that first kiss was to me? Had I possessed all the crowns of all the earth I would have given them to you as willingly. Now you know the value I placed on it, however worthless it was to you. Yet I was a cheerful giver of that gift, was I not? And can you find it in your heart to make of it a shame to me—that of which I was so proud?"

She stood there, with head inclined a little to one side, looking at him inquiringly as it awaited an answer. He did not speak, but looked steadily at his book. I felt, however, that he was changing, and I was sure her beauty, never more exquisite than in its present humility, would get alone for even so great a fault as hers. Err, look beautiful and receive remission! Such a woman as Mary carries her indulgence in her face.

I now began to realize for the first time the wondrous power of this girl, and ceased to marvel that she had always been able to turn even the king, the most violent, stubborn man on earth, to her own wishes. Her manner made her words eloquent, and already, with true feminine tactics, she had put Brandon in the wrong in everything because he was wrong in part.

Then she quickly went over what she had said to me. She told of her great dread lest the king should learn of the visit to Grouche's and its fatal consequences, knowing full well it would render Henry impervious to her influence and precipitate the French marriage. She told him of how she was going to the king the day after the arrest to ask his release, and of the meeting with Buckingham, and his promise.

Still Brandon said nothing and stood as if politely waiting for her to withdraw.

She remained silent a little time, waiting for him to speak, when tears, partly of vexation, I think, moistened her eyes.

"Tell me at least," she said, "that you know I speak the truth. I have always believed in you, and now I ask for your faith. I would not lie to you in the faintest shading of a thought—not for heaven itself—not even for your love and forgiveness, much as they are to me, and I want to know that you are sure of my truthfulness, if you doubt all else. You see I speak plainly of what your love is to me, for although by remaining away you made me fear I had been too lavish with my favors—that is every woman's fear—I knew in my heart you loved me; that you could not have done and said what you did otherwise. Now you see what faith I have in you, and you a man, whom a woman's instinct prompts to doubt. How does it compare with your faith in me, a woman, whom all the instincts of a manly nature should dispose to trust? It seems to be an unwritten law that a man may lie to a woman concerning the most important thing in life to her and be proud of it, but you see even now I have all faith in your love for me, else I surely should not be here. You see I trust even your unspoken word, when it might, without much blame to you, be a spoken lie; yet you do not trust me, who have no world-given right to speak falsely about such things, and when that which I now do is full of shame for me, and what I have done full of guilt, if inspired by aught but the purest truth from my heart of hearts. Your words mean so much—so much more, I think, than you realize—and are so cruel in turning to evil the highest, purest impulse a woman can feel—the glowing pride in self surrender and the sweet, delightful privilege of giving where she loves. How can you? How can you?"

How eloquent she was! It seemed to me this would have melted the frozen sea, but I think Brandon felt that now his only hope lay in the safeguard of his constantly upheld indignation.

When he spoke he ignored all she had said.

"You did well to employ my Lord of Buckingham. It will make matters more interesting when I tell you it was he who attacked you and was caught by the leg under his wounded horse; he was lame, I am told, for some time afterward. I had watched him following you from the gate at Bridewell and at once recognized him when his mask fell off during the fight by the wall. You have done well at every step, I say."

"Oh, God; to think of it! Had I but known! Buckingham shall pay for this with his head; but how could I know? I was but a poor, distracted girl, sure to make some fatal error. I was in such agony—your wounds—believe me, I suffered more from them than you could. Every pain you felt was a pang for me—and then that awful marriage! I was being sold like a wretched slave to that old squire, to be groined over and feasted upon. No man can know the horror of that thought to a woman—to any woman, good or bad. To have one's beauty turn to curse her and make her desirable only—only as well fed cattle are prized. No matter how great the manifestation of such so called love, it all the more repels a woman and adds to her loathing day by day. Then there was something worse than all—that she was almost weeping now—"I might have been able to bear the thought even of that hideous marriage—others have lived through the like—but after—that—that day—when you—it seemed that your touch was a spark dropped into a heart full of tinder, which had been lying there awaiting it all these years. In that one moment the flame grew so intense I could not withstand it. My throat ached; I could scarcely breathe, and it seemed that my heart would burst!" Here the tears gushed forth as she took a step toward him with outstretched arms and said between sobs: "I wanted you, you, for my husband—for my husband, and I could not bear the torturing thought of losing you or enduring any other man. I could not give you up after that—it was all too late, too late; it had gone too far. I was lost, lost!"

He sprang to where she stood leaning toward him and caught her to his breast.

(To be Continued.)

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