

When Knighthood Was In Flower

Or, The Love Story of Charles Brandon and Mary Tudor, the King's Sister, and Her Marriage to Henry the Eighth.

By Edwin Gaskell (Charles Major)

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"That made me angry," said she. "I pouted for awhile and two or three times was on the point of dismissing him, but thought better of it and asked him plainly wherein I did so much amiss. Then what do you think the impudent fellow said?"

"He said, 'Oh, there is so much it would take a lifetime to tell.' "This made me furious, but I could not answer, and a moment later he said, 'Nevertheless I should be only too glad to undertake the task.' "The thought never occurred to either of us then that he would be taken at his word. Bold? I should think he was! I never saw anything like it! I have not told you a tenth part of what he said to me that day. He said nothing that I could either stop him nor retaliate. Half the time I was angry and half the time amused, but by the time we reached Windsor there never was a girl more hopelessly and desperately in love than Mary Tudor. And she laughed as if it were a huge joke on Mary.

She continued: "That day settled matters with me for all time. I don't know how he did it. Yes, I do." And she launched forth into an account of Brandon's perfections, which I found somewhat dull, and so would you.

We remained a day or two at Windsor and then, over the objections of our chaperons, moved on to Berkeley castle, where Margaret of Scotland was spending the summer.

On the afternoon of the appointed day the princess suggested a hawk party, and we set out in the direction of the rendezvous. Our party consisted of myself, three other gentlemen and three ladies besides Mary. Jane did not go. I was afraid to trust her. She went and with difficulty forced herself to say something about a headache, but the rest of the inmates of the castle of course had no thought that possibly they were taking their last look upon Mary Tudor.

Think you this girl was we were running away with! What reckless fools we were not to have seen the utter hopelessness, certain failure and deadly peril of our act; treason black as Plutonian midnight. But Providence seems to have an especial care for fools, while wise men are left to care for themselves, and it does look as if safety lies in folly.

We rode on and on, and although I took two occasions in the presence of others to urge Mary to return, owing to the approach of night and threatened rain, she took her own head, as everybody knew she always would, and continued the hunt.

Just before dark, as we neared the rendezvous, Mary and I managed to ride ahead of the party quite a distance. At last we saw a heron rise, and the princess uncapped her hawk.

"This is my chance," she said. "I will run away from you now and lose myself. Keep them off my track for five minutes, and I shall be free. Goodby, Edwin. You and Jane are the only persons I regret to leave. I love you as my brother and sister. When we are settled in New Spain, we will have you both come to us. Now, Edwin, I shall tell you something: Don't let Jane put you off any longer. She loves you. She told me so. There! Goodby, my friend. Kiss her a thousand times for me." And she flew her bird and galloped after it at headlong speed.

Soon the princess was out of sight, and I waited for the others to overtake me. When they came up, I was greeted in chorus, "Where is the princess?" I said she had gone off with her hawk and had left me to bring them after her. I held them talking while I could, and when we started to follow took up the wrong scent. A short ride made this apparent, when I came in for my full share of abuse and ridicule, for I had led them against their judgment. I was credited with being a blockhead, when, in fact, they were the dupes. We rode hurriedly back to the palace

of Mary's departure and would not have been so easily deceived, but my object had been accomplished, and I knew that within twenty minutes from the time I last saw her she would be with Brandon on the road to Bristol, gaining on any pursuit we could make at the rate of three miles for two. We scoured the forest far and near, but of course found no trace. After a time rain set in and one of the gentlemen escorted the ladies home, while three of us remained to prowling about the woods and roads all night in a soaking drizzle. The task was tiresome enough for me, as it lacked motive, and when we rode into Berkeley castle next day a sorrier set of bedraggled, rain stained, mud covered knights you never saw. You may know the castle was wild with excitement. There were all sorts of conjectures, but soon we unanimously concluded it had been the work of high-walkers, of whom the country was full and by whom the princess had certainly been abducted.

The chaperons forgot their gait and each other, and Jane, who was the most affected of all, had a genuine excuse for giving vent to her grief and went to bed—by far the safest place for her.

What was to be done? First, we sent a message to the king, who would probably have us all fayed alive, a fear which the chaperons shared to the full extent. Next, an armed party rode back to look again for Mary and, if possible, rescue her.

The fact that I had been out the entire night before, together with the small repute in which I was held for deeds of arms, excused me from taking part in this bootless errand, so again I profited by the small esteem in which I was held. I say I profited, for I stayed at the castle with Jane, hoping to find my opportunity in the absence of everybody else. All the ladies but Jane had ridden out, and the knights who had been with me scouring the forest were sleeping, since they had not my incentive to remain awake. They had no message to deliver, no duty to perform for an absent friend. A thousand! Only think of it! I wished it had been a million, and so faithful was I to my trust that I swore in my soul I would deliver them, every one.

And Jane loved me! No more walking on the hard, prosaic earth now. From this time forth I would fly; that was the only sensible method of locomotion. Mary had said, "She told me so." Could it really be true? You will at once see what an advantage this bit of information was to me.

I hoped that Jane would wish to see me to talk over Mary's escape; so I sent word to her that I was waiting, and she quickly enough recovered her health and came down. I suggested that we walk out to a secluded little summer house by the river, and Jane was willing. Ah, my opportunity was here at last!

Jane's whole attitude toward me was changed, and she seemed to cling to me in a shy, unconscious manner, that was sweet beyond the naming, as the one solace for all her grief.

After I had answered all her questions and had told her over and over again every detail of Mary's flight and had assured her that the princess was at that hour breathing the waves with Brandon on their highroad to paradise, I thought it time to start myself in the same direction and to say a word in my own behalf. So I spoke very freely and told Jane what I felt and what I wanted.

"Oh, Sir Edwin," she responded, "let us not think of anything but my mistress. Think of the trouble she is in."

"No, no, Jane. Lady Mary is out of her trouble by now and is as happy as a lark, you may be sure. Has she not won everything her heart longed for? Then let us make our own paradise, since we have helped them make theirs. You have it, Jane, just within your lips. Speak the word, and it will change everything, if you love me, and I know you do."

Jane's head was bowed, and she remained silent. Then I told her of Lady Mary's message and begged, if she would not speak in words what I so longed to hear, she would at least tell it by allowing me to deliver only one little thousandth part of the message Mary had sent, but she drew away and said she would return to the castle if I continued to behave in that manner. I begged hard and tried to argue the point, but logic seems to lose its force in such a situation, and all I said availed nothing. Jane was obstinate and was for going back at once. Her persistence was beginning to look like obstinacy, and I soon grew so angry that I asked no permission, but delivered Mary's message, or a good part of it at least, whether she would or no, and then sat back and asked her what she was going to do about it.

Poor little Jane thought she was undone for life. She sat there half pouting, half weeping, and said she could do nothing about it; that she was alone now, and if I, her only friend, would treat her that way she did not know where to look.

"Where to look?" I demanded. "Look here, Jane; here. You might as well understand first as last that I will not be trifled with longer, and that I intend to continue treating you that way as long as we both live. I have determined not to permit you to behave as you have for so long, for I know you love me. You have half told me so a dozen times, and even your half words are whole truths. There is not a fraction of a lie in you. Besides, Mary told me that you told her so."

"She did not tell you that?" "Yes, upon my knightly honor." Of course there was but one answer to this—tears. I then brought the battle to close quarters at once, and, with my

arm uninterupted at my lady's waist, asked: "Did you not tell her so? I know you will speak nothing but the truth. Did you not tell her? Answer me, Jane." The fair head nodded as she whispered between the hands that covered her face.

"Yes, I—I—did," and I—well, I delivered the rest of Mary's message, and that, too, without a protest from Jane. Truthfulness is a pretty good thing, after all.

So Jane was conquered at last, and I heaved a sigh as the battle ended, for it had been a long, hard struggle.

I asked Jane when we should be married, but she said she could not think of that now—not until she knew that Mary was safe, but she would promise to be my wife some time.

We went back to the castle, and as we parted Jane said timidly: "I am glad I told you, Edwin. Glad it is over."

CHAPTER XVII. THE ELOPEMENT. **W**HATEVER the king might think, I knew Lord Wolsey would quickly enough guess the truth when he heard that the princess was missing, and would have a party in pursuit. The run-aways, however, would have at least twenty-four hours the start, and a ship leaves no tracks. When Mary left me, she was perhaps two-thirds of a league from the rendezvous, and night was rapidly falling. As her road lay through a dense forest all the way she would have a dark, lonely ride of a few minutes, and I was somewhat uneasy for that part of the journey. It had been agreed that if everything was all right at the rendezvous Mary should turn loose her horse, which had always been stabled at Berkeley castle and would quickly take a thread would be tied in his forelock. The horse took his time in returning and did not arrive until the second morning after the flight, but when he came I found the thread and, unobserved, removed it. I quickly took it to Jane, who has it yet and cherishes it for the mute message of comfort it brought her. In case the horse should not return I was to find a token in a hollow tree near the place of meeting, but the thread in the forelock told us our friends had found each other.

When we left the castle, Mary wore under her riding habit a suit of man's attire, and as we rode along she would shrug her shoulders and laugh as if it were a huge joke and by the most comical little pantomime call my attention to her unusual bulk. So when she found Brandon the only change necessary to make a man of her was to throw off the riding habit and pull on the jack boots and slouch hat, both of which Brandon had with him.

They wasted no time, you may be sure, and were soon under way. In a few minutes they picked up the two Bristol men who were to accompany them, and when night had fairly fallen left the bypaths and took to the main road leading from London to Bath and Bristol. The road was a fair one—that is, it was well defined and there was no danger of losing it; in fact, there was more danger of losing one's self in its fathomless mudholes and quagmires. Brandon had recently passed over it twice and had made mental note of the worst places, so he hoped to avoid them.

Soon the rain began to fall in a soaking drizzle; then the lamps of twilight went out, and even the shadows of the blinding darkness. It was one of those black nights fit for witch traveling. No doubt every witch in England was out brewing mischief. The horse's hoofs sucked and splashed in the mud with a sound that Mary thought might be heard at Land's End, and the hoot of an owl, now and then disturbed by a witch, would strike upon her ear with a volume of sound infinitely disproportionate to the size of any owl she had ever seen or dreamed of before.

Brandon wore our cushion, the great cloak, and had provided a like one of suitable proportions for the princess. This came in good play, as her fine gentleman's attire would be but poor stuff to turn the water. The wind, which had arisen with just enough force to set up a dismal wail, gave the rain a horizontal slant and drove it in at every opening. The flaps of the comfortable great cloak blew back from Mary's knees, and she felt many a chilling drop through her fine silk trunks that made her wish for buckram in their place. Soon the water began to trickle down her legs and find lodgment in the jack boots, and as the rain and wind came in tremendous little whirls she felt wretched enough—she who had always been so well sheltered from every blast. Now and then mud and water would fly up into her face—striking in the eyes or mouth—and then again her horse would stumble and almost throw her over his head as she sank, knee deep, into some unexpected hole.

All of this, with the thousand and one noises that broke the still worse silence of the inky night, soon began to work upon her nerves and make her fearful. The road was full of dangers aside from stumbling horses and broken necks, for many were the stories of murder and robbery committed along the route they were traveling. It is true they had two stout men, and all were armed, yet they might easily come upon a party too strong for them, and no one could tell what might happen, thought the princess. There was that pitchy darkness through which she could hardly see her horse's head—a thing of itself that seemed to have infinite powers for mischief and which no amount of argument ever induced any normally constituted woman to believe was the mere negative absence of light and not a terrible entity potent for all sorts of mischief. Then that wailing howl that rose and fell between no wind ever made such a noise she felt sure. There were those situ-

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Is it any wonder Mary's gallant but womanly spirit sank low in the face of all those horrors? She held out bravely, however, and an occasional clasp from Brandon's hand under cover of the darkness comforted her. When all those terrors would not suggest even a thought of turning back, you may judge of the character of this girl and her motive.

They traveled on, galloping when they could, trotting when they could not gallop, and walking when they must, and about midnight arrived at the inn where the relay of horses was awaiting them.

The inn was a rambling old thatched roof structure, half mud, half wood and all filth. There are many inns in England that are tidy enough, but this one was a little off the main road—selected for that reason—and the uncleanness was not the least of Mary's trials that hard night. She had not tasted food since noon and felt the keen hunger natural to youth and health such as hers after twelve hours of fasting and eight hours of riding. Her appetite soon overcame her repugnance, and she ate with a zest that had never passed her lips. One often misses the rest of life's joys by having too much of them. One must want a thing before it can be appreciated.

A hard ride of five hours brought our travelers to Bath, which place they rode around just as the sun began to gild the tile roofs and steeples, and another hour brought them to Bristol.

The ship was to sail at sunrise, but as the wind had died out with the

night there was no danger of its sailing without them. Soon the gates opened, and the party rode to the Bow and String, where Brandon had left their chests. The men were then paid off; quick sale was made of the horses; breakfast was served, and they started for the wharf, with their chests following in the hands of four porters.

A boat soon took them aboard the Royal Hind, and now it looked as if their daring scheme, so full of improbability as to seem impossible, had really come to a successful issue.

From the beginning, I think, it had never occurred to Mary to doubt the result. There had never been with her even a suggestion of possible failure, unless it was that evening in our room, when, prompted by her startled modesty, she had said she could not bear for us to see her in the trunk hose. Now that fruition seemed about to crown her hopes she was happy to hear her own core, and when once to herself went for sheer joy. It is little wonder she was happy. She was leaving behind no one whom she loved excepting Jane and perhaps me. No father nor mother; only a sister whom she barely knew and a brother whose treatment of her had turned her heart against him. She was also fleeing with the one man in all the world for her and from a marriage that was literally worse than death.

Our travelers were of course greatly in need of rest, so Mary went to her room and Brandon took a berth in the cabin set apart for the gentlemen.

They had both paid for their passage, although they had enlisted and were part of the ship's company. They were not expected to do sailor's work, but would be called upon in case of fighting to do their part at that. Mary was probably as good a fighter in her own way as one could find in a long journey, but how she was to do her part with sword and buckler Brandon did not know. That, however, was a bridge to be crossed when they should come to it.

They had gone aboard about 7 o'clock, and Brandon hoped the ship would be well down Bristol channel before he should leave his berth. But the wind that had filled Mary's jack boots with rain and had howled so dimly all night long would not stir, now that it was wanted. Noon came, yet no wind, and the sun shone as placidly as if Captain Charles Brandon were not fuming with impatience on the poop of the Royal Hind. Three o'clock and no wind. The captain said it would come with night, but sundown was almost at hand, and no wind yet. Brandon knew this meant failure if it held a little longer, for he was certain the King, with Wolsey's help, would long since have guessed the truth.

Brandon had not seen the princess since morning, and the delicacy he felt about going to her cabin made the situation somewhat difficult. After sitting it off from hour to hour in his

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