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WHEN KNIGHTHOOD WAS IN FLOWER

Or, The Love Story of Charles Brandon and Mary Tudor, the King's Sister, and Happening in the Reign of His August Majesty King Henry the Eighth

Rewritten and Rendered into Modern English From Sir Edwin Caskoden's Memoir

By EDWIN CASKODEN [CHARLES MAJOR]

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CHAPTER XV. TO MAKE A MAN OF HER.

So it was all arranged, and I converted part of Mary's jewels into money. She said she was sorry now she had not taken De Longueville's diamonds, as they would have added to her treasure. I, however, procured quite a large sum, to which I secretly added a goodly portion out of my own store. At Mary's request I sent part to Bradhurst at Bristol and retained the rest for Brandon to take with him.

A favorable answer soon came from Bristol, giving the young nobleman a separate room in consideration of the large purse he had sent.

The next step was to procure the gentleman's wardrobe for Mary. This was a little troublesome at first, for of course she could not be measured in the regular way. We managed to overcome this difficulty by having Jane take the measurements under instructions received from the tailor, which measurements, together with the cloth, I took to the fractional little man who did my work.

He looked at the measurements with twinkling eyes and remarked: "Sir Edwin, that be the curious-shaped man ever I see the measures of. Sure, it would make a mighty handsome woman or I know nothing of human dimensions."

"Never you mind about dimensions. Make the garments as they are ordered and keep your mouth shut, if you know what is to your interest. Do you hear?"

He delivered himself of a labored wink. "I do hear and understand, too, and my tongue is like the tongue of an obelisk."

In due time I brought the suits to Mary, and they were soon adjusted to her liking.

The days passed rapidly till it was a matter of less than a fortnight until the Royal Hind would sail, and it really looked as if the adventure might turn out to our desire. Jane was in tribulation and thought she ought to be taken along. This, you may be sure, was touching me very closely, and I began to wish the whole infernal mess at the bottom of the sea. If Jane went, his august majesty King Henry VIII. would be without a master of the dance just as sure as the stars twinkled in the firmament. It was, however, soon decided that Brandon would have his hands more than full to get off with one woman, and that two would surely spoil the plan. So Jane was to be left behind, fully of tribulation and indignation, firmly convinced that she was being treated very badly.

Mary's vanity was delighted with her elopement trousseau, for of course it was of the finest. Not that the quality was better than her usual wear, but doublet and hose were so different on her. She paraded for an hour or so before Jane, and as she became accustomed to the new garb and as the steel reflected a most beautiful image she determined to show herself to Brandon and me. She said she wanted to become accustomed to being seen in her doublet and hose and would begin with us. She thought if she could not bear our gaze she would surely make a dismal failure on shipboard among so many strange men. There was some good reasoning in this, and it, together with her vanity, overruled her modesty and prompted her to come to see us in her character of young nobleman. Jane made one of her mighty protests, so infinitely disproportionate in size to her little ladyship, but the self-willed princess would not listen to her and was for coming alone if Jane would not come with her. Once having determined, as usual with her, she wasted no time about it, but, throwing a long cloak over her shoulders, started for our rooms, with angry, weeping, protesting Jane at her heels.

When I heard the knock, I was sure it was the girls, for though Mary had promised Brandon she would not under any circumstances attempt another visit I knew so well her utter inability to combat her desire and her reckless disregard of danger where there was a motive sufficient to furnish the nerve tension that I was sure she would come or try to come again.

I admitted the girls, and when the door was shut Mary unclasped the brooch at her throat, and the great cloak fell to her heels. Out she stepped, with a little laugh of delight, clothed in doublet, hose and confusion, the prettiest picture mortal eyes ever rested on. Her hat, something on the broad, flat style with a single white plume encircling the crown, was of purple velvet trimmed in gold braid and touched here and there with precious stones. Her doublet was of the same purple velvet as her hat, trimmed in lace and gold braid. Her short trunks were of heavy black silk slashed by yellow satin, with hose of lavender silk, and her little shoes were of russet French leather. Quite a rainbow, you will say, but such a rainbow!

Brandon and I were struck dumb with admiration and could not keep from showing it. This disconcerted the girl and increased her embarrassment until we could not tell which was the prettiest, the garments, the girl or the confusion, but this I know—the

whole picture was as sweet and beautiful as the eyes of man could behold.

Fine feathers will not make fine birds, and Mary's masculine attire could no more make her look like a man than harness can disguise the graces of a gazelle. Nothing could conceal her intense, exquisite womanhood. With our looks of astonishment and admiration Mary's blushes deepened.

"What is the matter? Is anything wrong?" she asked.

"Nothing is wrong," answered Brandon, smiling in spite of himself. "Nothing on earth is wrong with you, you may be sure. You are perfect—that is, for a woman—and one who thinks there is anything wrong about a perfect woman is hard to please. But if you flatter yourself that you in any way resemble a man or that your dress in the faintest degree conceals your sex you are mistaken. It makes it only more apparent."

"How can that be?" asked Mary in comical tribulation. "Is not this a man's doublet and hose, and this hat—is it not a man's hat? They are all for a man. Then why do I not look like one, I ask? Tell me what is wrong. Oh, I thought I looked just like a man. I thought the disguise was perfect."

"Well," returned Brandon, "if you will permit me to say so, you are entirely too symmetrical and shapely ever to pass for a man."

The flaming color was in her cheeks as Brandon went on: "Your feet are too small, even for a boy's feet. I don't think you could be made to look like a man if you worked from now till doomsday."

Brandon spoke in a troubled tone, for he was beginning to see in Mary's perfect and irrepensible womanhood an insurmountable difficulty right across his path.

"As to your feet, you might find larger shoes, or, better still, jack boots, and, as to your hose, you might wear longer trunks, but what to do about the doublet I am sure I do not know."

Mary looked up helpless and forlorn, and the hot face went into her bended elbow as a realization of the situation seemed to dawn upon her.

"Oh, I wish I had not come! But I wanted to grow accustomed, so that I could wear them before others. I believe I could bear it more easily with any one else. I did not think of it in that way." And she snatched her cloak from where it had fallen on the floor and threw it around her.

"What way, Mary?" asked Brandon gently and receiving no answer. "But you will have to bear my looking at you all the time if you go with me."

"I don't believe I can do it."

"No, no," answered he, bravely attempting cheerfulness; "we may as well give it up. I have had no hope from the first. I knew it could not be done, and it should not. I was both insane and criminal to think of permitting you to try it."

Brandon's forced cheerfulness died out with his words, and he sank into a chair, with his elbows on his knees and



Brandon and I were struck dumb with admiration.

his face in his hands. Mary ran to him at once. There had been a little moment of faltering, but there was no real surrender in her.

Dropping on her knee beside him, she said coaxingly: "Don't give up. You are a man; you must not surrender and let me, a girl, prove the stronger. Shame upon you when I look up to you so much and expect you to help me be brave! I will go. I will arrange myself in some way. Oh, why am I not different? I wish I were as straight as the queen." And for that first time in her life she bewailed her beauty because it stood between her and Brandon.

She soon coaxed him out of his despondency, and we began again to plan the matter in detail.

The girls sat on Brandon's cloak and he and I on the camp stool and a box. Mary's time was well occupied in vain attempts to keep herself covered with the cloak, which seemed to have a right good will toward Brandon and me, but she kept track of our plans, which, in brief, were as follows: As to her costume, we would substitute long trunks and jack boots for shoes

and hose, and, as to doublet, Mary laughed and blushing said she had a plan which she would secretly impart to Jane, but would not tell us. She whispered it to Jane, who, as serious as the lord chancellor, gave judgment and "thought it would do." We hoped so, but were full of doubts.

This is all tame enough to write and read about, but I can tell you it was sufficiently exciting at the time. Three of us at least were playing with that comical fellow, Death, and he gave the game interest and point to our hearts' content.

As to the elopement, it was determined that Brandon should leave London the following day for Bristol and make all arrangements along the line. He would carry with him two bundles, his own and Mary's clothing, and leave them to be taken up when they should go a-shipboard. Eight horses would be procured, four to be left as a relay at an inn between Berkeley castle and Bristol and four to be kept at the rendezvous some two leagues the other side of Berkeley for the use of Brandon, Mary and the two men from Bristol who were to act as an escort on the eventful night. There was one disagreeable little feature that we could not provide against nor entirely eliminate. It was the fact that Jane and I should be suspected as accomplices before the fact of Mary's elopement, and, as you know, to assist in the abduction of a princess is treason, for which there is but one remedy. I thought I had a plan to keep ourselves safe if I could only stifle for the once Jane's troublesome and vigorous tendency to preach the truth to all people upon all subjects and at all times and places. She promised to tell the story I should drill into her, but I knew the truth would seep out in a thousand ways. She could no more hold it than a sieve can hold water. We were playing for great stakes, which, if I do say it, none but the bravest hearts, bold and daring as the truest knights of chivalry, would think of trying for—nothing less than the running away with the first princess of the first blood royal of the world. Think of it! It appalls me even now. Discovery meant death to one of us surely, Brandon; possibly to two others, Jane and me, certainly if Jane's truthfulness should become unmanageable, as it was apt to do.

After we had settled everything we could think of the girls took their leave, Mary slyly kissing Brandon at the door. I tried to induce Jane to follow her lady's example, but she was as cool and distant as the new moon.

The next day Brandon paid his respects to the king and queen, made his adieux to his friends and rode off alone to Bristol. You may be sure the king showed no signs of undue grief at his departure.

CHAPTER XVI. A HAWKING PARTY.

A FEW days after Brandon's departure, Mary, with the king's consent, organized a small party to go over to Windsor for a few weeks during the warm weather.

There were ten or twelve of us, including two chaperons, the old Earl of Hertford and the dowager Duchess of Kent. Henry might as well have sent along a pair of spaniels to act as chaperons—it would have taken an army to guard Mary alone—and to tell you the truth our old chaperons needed watching more than any of us. It was scandalous. Each of them had a touch of gout, and when they made wary faces it was a standing inquiry among us whether they were keering at each other or felt a twinge—whether it was their feet or their hearts that troubled them.

Mary led them a pretty life at all times, even at home in the palace, and I know they would rather have gone off with a pack of imps than with us. The inducement was that it gave them better opportunities to be together, an arrangement connived at by the queen. I think, and they were satisfied. The earl had a wife, but he fancied the old dowager and she fancied him, and probably the wife fancied somebody else, so they were all happy. It greatly amused the young people, you may be sure, and Mary said, probably without telling the exact truth, that every night she prayed God to pity and forgive their ugliness. One day the princess said she was becoming alarmed. Their ugliness was so intense she feared it might be contagious and spread. Then, with a most comical seriousness, she added:

"Mon Dieu, Sir Edwin, what if I should catch it? Master Charles would not take me."

"No danger of that, my lady. He is too devoted to see anything but beauty in you, no matter how much you might change."

"Do you really think so? He says so little about it that sometimes I almost doubt."

Therein she spoke the secret of Brandon's success with her, at least in the beginning, for there is wonderful potency in the stimulus of a healthy little doubt.

We had a delightful canter over to Windsor, I riding with Mary most of the way. I was not averse to this ar-

range, as I not only relished Mary's mirth and joyousness, which were at their height, but hoped I might give my little Lady Jane a twinge or two of jealousy, perchance to fertilize her sentiments toward me.

Mary talked and laughed and sang, for her soul was a fountain of gladness that bubbled up the instant pressure was removed. She spoke of little but our last trip over this same road, and, as we passed objects on the way, told me of what Brandon had said at this place and that. She laughed and dimpled exquisitely in relating how she had deliberately made opportunities for him to flatter her until at last she smiled in her face and told her she was the most beautiful creature living, but that, after all, "beauty was as beauty did."

"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?"

"I cannot guess."

"He said, 'Oh, there is so much it would take a lifetime to tell it!'"

"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 anything he wished, and it seemed that I could neither 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.

We had another beautiful ride up the dear old Thames to Berkeley, but Mary had grown serious and saw none of it.

On the afternoon of the appointed day the princess suggested a hawking 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 wept 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 who 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 safe. 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 point of Mary's departure and wound our horns lustily, 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 prow 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 highwaymen, of whom the country was full and by whom the princess had certainly been abducted.

The chaperons forgot their gout 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 flayed alive, a fear which the chaperons shared to the fullest 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 obdurate 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

CONTINUE

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