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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

Re-written and Rendered into Modern English from Sir Edwin Caskoden's Memoir

By EDWIN CASKODEN [CHARLES MAJOR]

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### CHAPTER XVII. THE ELOPEMENT.

WHATEVER 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 runaways, 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 trot home. To further emphasize her safety 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 night were lost among themselves in blinding darkness. It was one of those black nights fit for witch traveling, and 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 new 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 tremulous little whirs 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 usually in the eyes or mouth—and then again her horse would stumble and almost throw her over his head as he 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 betimes. No wind ever made such a noise she felt sure. There were those shining white gleams which came from the little pools of water on the road, looking like dead men's faces upturned and pale. Perhaps they were water and perhaps they were not. Mary had all

confidence in Brandon, but that very fact operated against her. Having that confidence and trust in him, she felt no need to waste her own energy in being brave. So she relaxed completely and had the feminine satisfaction of allowing herself to be thoroughly frightened.

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 cleanliness 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 was new to her the humblest fare that had ever passed her lips. One often misses the zest 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 agild 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



She ate with a zest the humble fare.

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 her heart's 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 feeling 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 putting it off from hour to hour in hope that she would appear of her own accord, he at last knocked at her door and, of course, found the lady in trouble.

The thought of the princess going on deck caused a sinking at his heart every time it came, as he felt that it was almost impossible to conceal her identity. He had not seen her in her new male attire, for when she threw off her riding habit on meeting him the night before he had intentionally busied himself about the horses and saw her only after the great cloak covered her as a gown. He felt that however well her garments might conceal her form, no man on earth ever had such beauty in his face as her transcendent eyes, rose

tinted cheeks and coral lips, with their cluster of dimples, and his heart sank at the prospect. She might hold out for awhile with a straight face, but when the smiles should come—it were just as well to hang a placard about her neck, "This is a woman." The telltale dimples would be worse than Jane for outspoken, untimely truthfulness and trouble provoking candor.

Upon entering Brandon found Mary wrestling with the problem of her complicated male attire, the most beautiful picture of puzzled distress imaginable. The port was open and showed her rosy as the morn when she looked up at him. The jack boots were in a corner, and her little feet seemed to put up a protest all their own against going into them that ought to have softened every peg. She looked up at Brandon with a half hearted smile and then threw her arms about his neck and sobbed like the child she was.

"Do you regret coming, Lady Mary?" asked Brandon, who, now that she was alone with him, felt that he must take no advantage of the fact to be familiar.

"No, no! Not for one moment. I am glad—only too glad. But why do you call me 'Lady'? You used to call me 'Mary'."

"I don't know; perhaps because you are alone."

"Ah! that is good of you; but you need not be quite so respectful."

The matter was settled by mute but satisfactory arbitration, and Brandon continued: "You must make yourself ready to go on deck. It will be hard, but it must be done."

He helped her with the heavy jack boots and handed her the rain stained slouch hat which she put on and stood a complete man ready for the deck—that is, as complete as could be evolved from her utter femininity.

When Brandon looked her over, all hope went out of him. It seemed that every change of dress only added to her bewitching beauty by showing it in a new phase.

"It will never do. There is no disguising you. What is it that despite everything shows so unmistakably feminine? What shall we do? I have it. You shall remain here under the pretense of illness until we are well at sea, and then I will tell the captain all. It is too bad, and yet I would not have you one whit less a woman for all the world. A man loves a woman who is so thoroughly womanly that nothing can hide it."

Mary was pleased at his flattery, but disappointed at the failure in herself. She had thought that surely these garments would make a man of her in which the keenest eye could not detect a flaw.

They were discussing the matter when a knock came at the door, with the cry, "All hands on deck for inspection." Inspection! Jesu! Mary would not safely endure it a minute. Brandon left her at once and went to the captain.

"My lord is ill and begs to be excused from deck inspection," he said.

Bradhurst, a surly old half pirate of the saltiest pattern, answered: "H! Then he had better go ashore as soon as possible. I will refund his money. We cannot make a hospital out of the ship. If his lordship is too ill to stand inspection, see that he goes ashore at once."

This last was addressed to one of the ship's officers, who answered with the usual "Aye, aye, sir," and started for Mary's cabin.

That was worse than ever, and Brandon quickly said he would have his lordship up at once. He then returned to Mary, and after buckling on her sword and belt they went on deck and climbed up the poop ladder to take their places with those entitled to stand aft.

Brandon has often told me since that it was as much as he could do to keep

back the tears when he saw Mary's wonderful effort to appear manly. It was both comical and pathetic. She was a princess to whom all the world bowed down, yet that did not help her here. After all she was only a girl, timid and fearful, following at Brandon's heels, frightened lest she should get out of arm's reach of him among those rough men and longing with all her heart to take his hand for moral as well as physical support. It must have been both laughable and pathetic in the extreme. That miserable sword persisted in tripping her, and the jack boots, so much too large, evinced an alarming tendency to slip off with every step. How insane we all were not to have foreseen this from the very beginning. It must have been a unique figure she presented climbing up the steps at Brandon's heels, jack boots and all. So unique was it that the sailors working in the ship's waist stopped their tasks to stare in wonderment and the gentlemen on the poop made no effort to hide their amusement. Old Bradhurst stepped up to her.

"I hope your lordship is feeling better," and then, surveying her from head to foot, with a broad grin on his features, "I declare, you look the picture of health, if I ever saw it. How old are you?"

Mary quickly responded, "Fourteen years."

"Fourteen," returned Bradhurst. "Well, I don't think you will shed much blood. You look more like a duced handsome girl than any man I ever saw." At this the men all laughed and were very impertinent in the free and easy manner of such gentry, most of whom were professional adventurers with every finer sense dulled and debased by years of vice.

These fellows, half of them tipsy, now gathered about Mary to inspect her personally, each on his own account. Their looks and conduct were very disconcerting, but they did nothing insulting until one fellow gave her a slap on the back, accompanying it by an indecent remark. Brandon tried to pay no attention to them, but this

was too much, so he lifted his arm and knocked the fellow off the poop into the waist. The man was back in a moment, and swords were soon drawn and clicking away at a great rate. The contest was brief, however, as the fellow was no sort of match for Brandon, who, with his old trick, quickly twisted his adversary's sword out of his grasp and with a flash of his own blade flung it into the sea. The other men were now talking together at a little distance in whispers, and in a moment one drunken brute shouted: "It is no man. It is a woman. Let us see more of her!"

Before Brandon could interfere the fellow had unbuckled Mary's doublet at the throat and with a jerk had torn it off, carrying away the sleeve and exposing Mary's shoulder, almost throwing her to the deck.

He waved his trophy on high, but his triumph was short lived, for almost instantly it fell to the deck, and with it the offending hand severed at the wrist by Brandon's sword. Three or four friends of the wounded man rushed upon Brandon, whereupon Mary screamed and began to weep, which of course told the whole story.

A great laugh went up, and instantly a general fight began. Several of the gentlemen, seeing Brandon attacked by such odds, took up his defense, and within twenty seconds all were on one side or the other, every mother's son of them fighting away like mad.

You see how quickly and completely one woman without the slightest act on her part, except a modest effort to be let alone, had set the whole company by the ears, cutting and slashing away at each other like very devils. The sex must generate mischief in some unknown manner and throw it off, as the sun throws off its heat. However, Jane is an exception to that rule—if it is a rule.

The officers soon put a stop to this lively little fight and took Brandon and Mary, who was weeping as any right minded woman would, down into the cabin for consultation.

With a great oath Bradhurst exclaimed: "It is plain enough that you have brought a girl on board under false colors, and you may as well make ready to put her ashore. You see what she has already done—a hand lost to one man and wounds for twenty others—and she was on deck less than five minutes. Heart of God! At that rate she would have the ship at the bottom of Davy Jones' locker before we could sail half down the channel."

"It was not my fault," sobbed Mary, her eyes flashing fire. "I did nothing; all I wanted was to be left alone, but those brutes of men—you shall pay for this; remember what I say. Did you expect Captain Brandon to stand back and not defend me when that wretch was tearing my garments off?"

"Captain Brandon, did you say?" asked Bradhurst, with his hat off instantly.

"Yes," answered that individual. "I shipped under an assumed name for various reasons, and desire not to be known. You will do well to keep my secret."

"Do I understand that you are Master Charles Brandon, the king's friend?" asked Bradhurst.

"I am," was the answer.

"Then, sir, I must ask your pardon for the way you have been treated. We of course could not know it, but a man must expect trouble when he attaches himself to a woman." It is a wonder the flashes from Mary's eyes did not strike the old seadog dead. He, however, did not see them and went on: "We are more than anxious that so valiant a knight as Sir Charles Brandon should go with us, and hope your reception will not drive you back. But as to the lady, you see already the result of her presence, and, much as we want you, we cannot take her. Aside from the general trouble which a wo-

man takes with her everywhere"—Mary would not even look at the creature—"on shipboard there is another and greater objection. It is said, you know, among sailors that a woman on board draws bad luck to certain sorts of ships, and every sailor would desert before we could weigh anchor if it were known this lady was to go with us. Should they find it out in midocean a mutiny would be sure to follow, and God only knows what would happen. For her sake if for no other reason take her ashore at once."

Brandon saw only too plainly the truth that he had really seen all the time, but to which he had shut his eyes, and, throwing Mary's cloak over her shoulders, prepared to go ashore. As they went over the side and pulled off a great shout went up from the ship far more derisive than cheering, and the men at the oars looked at each other askance and smiled. What a predicament for a princess! Brandon cursed himself for having been such a knave and fool as to allow this to happen. He had known the danger all the time, and his act could not be chargeable to ignorance or a failure to see the probable consequences. Temptation and selfish desire had given him temerity in place of judgment.

When the princess stepped ashore, it seemed to her as if the heart in her breast was a different and separate organ from the one she had carried aboard.

As the boat put off again for the ship its crew gave a cheer coupled with some vile advice, for which Brandon would gladly have run them through, each and every one. He had to swallow his chagrin and anger and really blamed no one but himself, though it was torture to him that this girl should be subjected to such insults and be powerless to avenge them. The news had spread from the wharf like wildfire, and on their way back to the Bow and String there came from small boys and hidden voices such exclamations as: "Look at the woman in man's clothing!" "Isn't he a beautiful man?" "Look at him blush!" and others too coarse to be repeated. Imagine the humiliating situation, from which there was no escape.

At last they reached the inn, whither their chests soon followed them, sent by Bradhurst, together with their passage money, which he very honestly refunded.

Mary soon donned her woman's attire, of which she had a supply in her chest, and at least felt more comfortable without the jack boots. She had made her toilet alone for the first time in her life, having no maid to help her, and wept as she dressed, for this disappointment was like plucking the very heart out of her. Her hope had been so high that the fall was all the harder. Nay, even more; hope had become fruition to her when they were once a-shipboard, and failure right at the door of success made it doubly hard to bear. It crushed her, and where before had been hope and confidence was nothing now but despair. Like all people with a great capacity for emotion, when she sank she touched the bottom. Alas, Mary, the unconquerable, was down at last.

This failure meant so much to her. It meant that she would never be Brandon's wife, but would go to France to endure the dreaded old Frenchman. At that thought a recoll-



He waved his trophy on high. Her spirit asserted itself, and she stamped her foot and swore upon her soul it should never be—never, never, so long as she had strength to fight or voice to cry "No!" The thought of this marriage and of the loss of Brandon was painful enough, but there came another, entirely new to her and infinitely worse.

Hastily arranging her dress she went in search of Brandon, whom she quickly found and took to her room.

After closing the door she said: "I thought I had reached the pinnacle of disappointment and pain when compelled to leave the ship, for it meant that I should lose you and have to marry Louis of France. But I have found that there is still a possible pain more poignant than either, and I cannot bear it; so I come to you—you who are the great cure for all my troubles. Oh, that I could lay them here all my life long," and she put her head upon his breast, forgetting what she had intended to say.

"What is the trouble, Mary?" "Oh, yes! I thought of that marriage and of losing you, and then, oh, Mary Mother! I thought of some other woman having you to herself. I could see her with you, and I was jealous—I think they call it. I have heard of the pangs of jealousy, and if the fear of a rival is so great what would the reality be? It would kill me; and I could not endure it. I cannot endure even this, and I want you to swear that—"

Brandon took her in his arms as she began to weep.

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