

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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(CONTINUED.)

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 breasting 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 uninterrupted 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—d-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."

She had evidently dreaded it, but—I was glad too. Very glad. Then I went to bed.

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 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 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 travelling, 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

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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.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

If every man's mind was geared to work a little faster than his tongue, many rash things would be left unsaid. —Philadelphia Telegraph.

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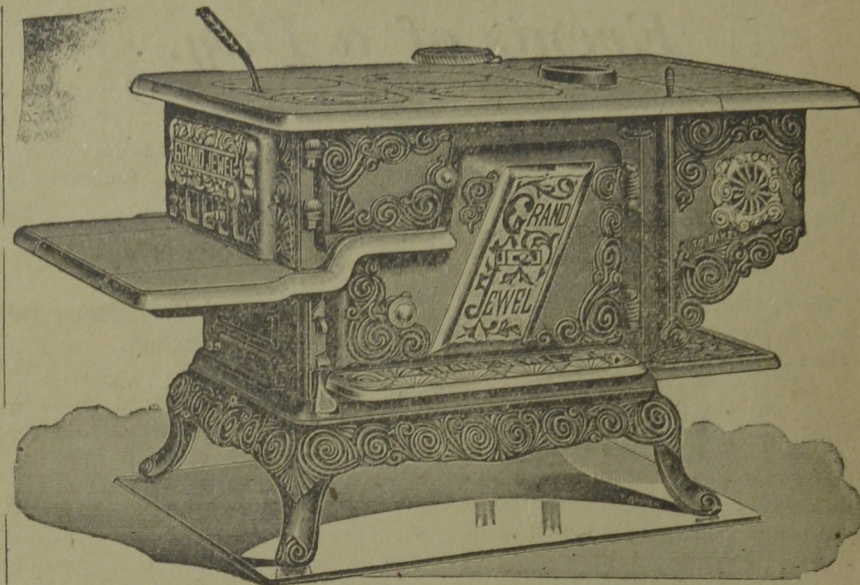
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