

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.)

Now, all or this, coming upon the heels of her trouble with Brandon, made her most wretched indeed. For the first time in her life she began to feel suffering—that great broadener, in fact maker, of human character.

Above all, there was an alarming sense of uncertainty in everything. She could hardly bring herself to believe that Brandon would really go to New Spain and that she would actually lose him, although she did not want him as yet—that is, as a prospective husband. Flashes of all sorts of wild schemes had begun to shoot through her anger and grief when she stared in the face the prospect of her double separation from him, her marriage to another and the countless miles of fathomless sea that would be between them. She could endure anything better than uncertainty. A menacing future is the keenest of all tortures for any of us to bear, but especially for a girl like Mary. Death itself is not so terrible as the fear of it.

Now, about this time there lived over in Billingsgate Ward, the worst part of London, a Jewish soothsayer named Grouche. He was also an astrologer and had of late grown into great fame as prophet of the future—a fortune teller.

His fame rested on several remarkable predictions which had been fulfilled to the letter, and I really think the man had some wonderful powers. They said he was half Jew, half gypsy, and, if there is alchemy in the mixing of blood, that combination should surely produce something peculiar. The city folk were said to have visited him in great numbers, and, notwithstanding the priests and bishops all condemned him as an imp of Satan and a follower of witchcraft, many fine people, including some court ladies, continued to go there by stealth in order to take a dangerous, inquisitive peep into the future.

Mary had long wanted to see this Grouche, at first out of mere curiosity, but Henry, who was very moral—with other people's consciences—would not think of permitting it. Two ladies, Lady Chesterfield and Lady Ormond, both good and virtuous women, had been detected in such a visit and had been disgraced and expelled from court in the most cruel manner by order of the king himself.

Now, added to Mary's old time desire to see Grouche, came a longing to know the outcome of the present momentous complication of affairs that touched her so closely.

She could not wait for Time to unfold himself and drop his budget of events as he traveled, but she must plunge ahead of him and know beforehand the stores of the fates, an intrusion they usually resent. I need not tell you that was Mary's only object in going, nor that her heart was as pure as a babe's, quite as chaste and almost as innocent. It is equally true that the large proportion of persons who visited Grouche made his soothsaying an excuse. The thought of how wretched life would be with Louis had put into Mary's mind the thought of how sweet it would be with Brandon. Then came the wish that Brandon had been a prince or even a great English nobleman, and then leaped up, all rainbow

hued, the hope that he might yet, by reason of his own great virtues, rise to all of these and she become his wife. But at the threshold of this fair castle came knocking the thought that perhaps he did not care for her and had deceived her to gain her favors. Then she flushed with anger and swore to herself she hated him and hoped never to see his face again. And the castle faded and was wafted away to the realms of airy nothingness.

Ah, how people will sometimes lie to themselves, and sensible people at that!

So Mary wanted to see Grouche, first, through curiosity, in itself a stronger motive than we give it credit for; second, to learn if she would be able to dissuade Henry from the French marriage and perhaps catch a hint how to do it, and last, but by no means least, to discover the state of Brandon's heart toward her.

By this time the last named motive was strong enough to draw her any whither, although she would not acknowledge it, even to herself, and in truth hardly knew it, so full are we of things we know not of.

So she determined to go to see

Grouche secretly and was confident she could arrange the visit in such a way that it would never be discovered.

One morning I met Jane, who told me with troubled face that she and Mary were going to London to make some purchases, would lodge at Bridewell House and go over to Billingsgate that evening to consult Grouche. Mary had taken the whim into her willful head, and Jane could not dissuade her.

The court was all at Greenwich, and nobody at Bridewell, so Mary thought they could disguise themselves as orange girls and easily make the trip without any one being the wiser.

It was then, as now, no safe matter for even a man to go unattended through the best parts of London after dark, to say nothing of Billingsgate, that nest of water rats and cutthroats. But Mary did not realize the full danger of the trip and would, as usual, allow nobody to tell her.

She had threatened Jane with all sorts of vengeance if she divulged her secret, and Jane was miserable enough between her fears on either hand, for Mary, though the younger, held her in complete subjection. Despite her fear of Mary, Jane asked me to go to London and follow them at a distance, unknown to the princess. I was to be on duty that night at a dance given in honor of the French envoys who had just arrived, bringing with them commission of special ambassador to De Longueville to negotiate the treaty of marriage, and it was impossible for me to go. Mary was going partly to avoid this ball, and her willful persistency made Henry very angry. I regretted that I could not go, but I promised Jane I would send Brandon in my place, and he would answer the purpose of protection far better than I. I suggested that Brandon take with him a man, but Jane, who was in mortal fear of Mary, would not listen to it. So it was agreed that Brandon should meet Jane at a given place and learn the particulars, and this plan was carried out.

Brandon went up to London and saw Jane, and before the appointed time hid himself behind a hedge near the private gate through which the girls intended to take their departure from Bridewell.

They would leave about dusk and return, so Mary said, before it grew dark.

The citizens of London at that time paid very little attention to the law requiring them to hang out their lights, and when it was dark it was dark.

Scarcely was Brandon safely ensconced behind a clump of arbor vitae when whom should he see coming down the path toward the gate but his grace, the Duke of Buckingham. He was met by one of the Bridewell servants who was in attendance upon the princess.

"Yes, your grace, this is the gate," said the girl. "You can hide yourself and watch them as they go. They will pass out on this path. As I said, I do not know where they are going. I only overheard them say they would go out



"Yes, your grace, this is the gate," at this gate just before dark. I am sure they go on some errand of gallantry, which your grace will soon learn, I make no doubt."

He replied that he would take care of that.

Brandon did not see where Buckingham hid himself, but soon the two innocent adventurers came down the path attired in the short skirts and bon-



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nets or orange girls and let themselves out at the gate. Buckingham followed them, and Brandon quickly followed him. The girls passed through a little postern in the wall opposite Bridewell House and walked rapidly up Fleet ditch, climbed Ludgate hill, passed Paul's church, turned toward the river down Bennett hill, to the left on Thames street, then on past the bridge, following Lower Thames street to the neighborhood of Fish street hill, where they took an alley leading up toward East Cheap to Grouche's house.

It was a brave thing for the girl to do and showed the determined spirit that dwelt in her soft white breast. Aside from the real dangers, there was enough to deter any woman, I should think.

Jane wept all the way over, but Mary never flinched.

There were great mudholes where one sank ankle deep, for no one paved the street at that time, strangely enough, preferring to pay the sixpence fine per square yard for leaving it undone. At one place, Brandon told me, a load of hay blocked the streets, compelling them to squeeze between the houses and the hay. He could hardly believe the girls had passed that way, as he had not always been able to keep them in view, but had sometimes to follow them by watching Buckingham. He, however, kept as close as possible and presently saw them turn down Grouche's alley and enter his house.

Upon learning where they had stopped, Buckingham hurriedly took himself off, and Brandon waited for the girls to come out. It seemed a very long time that they were in the wretched place, and darkness had well descended upon London when they emerged.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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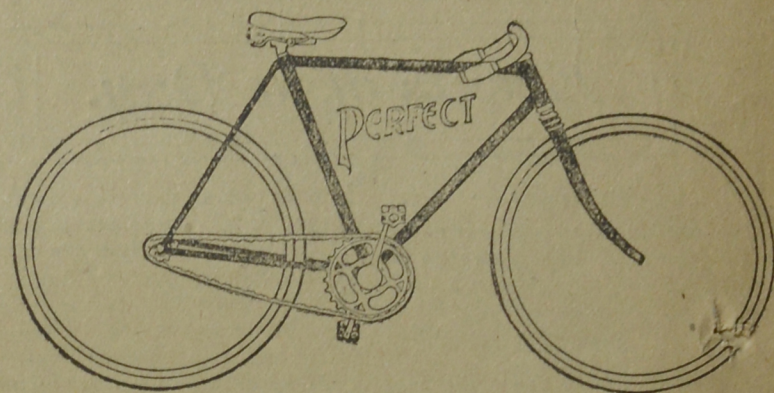
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