

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).

I saw the princess that afternoon and expected, of course, she would inquire for her defender. One who had given such timely help and who was suffering so much on her account was surely worth a little solicitude, but not a word did she ask. She did not come near me, but made a point of avoidance, as I could plainly see. The next morning she, with Jane, went over to Scotland palace without so much as a breath of inquiry from either of them. This heartless conduct enraged me, but I was glad to learn afterward that Jane's silence was at Mary's command, that bundle of selfishness fearing that any solicitude, however carefully shown, upon her part might reveal her secret.

It seems that Mary had recent intelligence of the forward state of affairs in the marriage negotiations and felt that a discovery by her brother of what she had done, especially in view of the disastrous results, would send her to France despite all the coaxing she could do from then till doomsday.

It was a terrible fate hanging over her, doubly so in view of the fact that she loved another man, and looking back at it all from the vantage point of time I cannot wonder that it drove other things out of her head and made her seem selfish in her frightened desire to save herself.

About 12 o'clock of the following night I was awakened by a knock at my door, and upon opening in walked a sergeant of the sheriff of London, with four yeomen at his heels.

The sergeant asked if one Charles Brandon was present, and upon my affirmative answer demanded that he be forthcoming. I told the sergeant that Brandon was confined to his bed with illness, whereupon he asked to be shown to his room.

It was useless to resist or to evade, so I awakened Brandon and took the sergeant in. Here he read his warrant to arrest Charles Brandon, Esq., for the murder of two citizens of London, perpetrated, done and committed upon the night of such and such a day of this year of our Lord 1514. Brandon's hat had been found by the side of the dead men, and the authorities had received information from a high source that Brandon was the guilty person. That high source was evidently Buckingham.

When the sergeant found Brandon covered with wounds, there was no longer any doubt, and, although hardly able to lift his hand, he was forced to dress and go with them. A horse litter was procured, and we all started to London.

While Brandon was dressing I said I would at once go and awaken the king, who, I knew, would pardon the offense when he heard my story, but Brandon asked the sergeant to leave us to ourselves for a short time, and closed the door.

"Please do nothing of the sort, Caskoden," said he. "If you tell the king, I will declare there is not one word of truth in your story. There is only one person in the world who may tell of that night's happenings, and if she does not they shall remain untold. She will make it all right at once, I know. I would not do her the foul wrong to think for one instant that she will fail. You do not know her. She sometimes seems selfish, but it is thoughtlessness fostered by flattery, and her heart is right. I would trust her with my life. If you breathe a word of what I have told you, you may do more harm than you can ever remedy, and I ask you to say nothing to any one. If the princess would not liberate me—but that is not to be thought of. Never doubt that she can and will do it better than you think. She is all gold."

This, of course, silenced me, as I did not know what new danger I might create or how I might mar the matter I so much wished to mend. I did not tell Brandon that the girls had left Greenwich or of my undefined and perhaps unfounded fear that Mary might not act as he thought she would in a great emergency, but silently helped him to dress and went to London along with him and the sheriff's sergeant.

Brandon was taken to Newgate, the most loathsome prison in London at that time, it being used for felons, while Ludgate was for debtors. Here he was thrown into an underground dungeon foul with water that seeped through the old masonry from the moat and

lived with every noisome thing that creeps. There was no bed, no stool, no floor, not even a wisp of straw; simply the reeking stone walls, covered with fungus, and the windowless arch overhead. One could hardly conceive a more horrible place in which to spend even a moment. I had a glimpse of it by the light of the keeper's lantern as they put him in, and it seemed to me a single night in that awful place would have killed me or driven me mad. I protested and begged and tried to bribe, but it was all of no avail. The keeper had been bribed before I arrived. Although it could do no possible good, I was glad to stand outside the prison walls in the drenching rain all the rest of that wretched night that I might be as near as possible to my friend and suffer a little with him.

As soon as the prison gates were opened next morning I again importuned the keeper to give Brandon a more comfortable cell, but his reply was that such crimes had of late become so frequent in London that no favor could be shown those who committed them, and that men like Brandon, who ought to know and act better, deserved the maximum punishment.

I told him he was wrong in this case; that I knew the facts, and everything would be clearly explained that very day and Brandon released.

"That's all very well," responded the stubborn creature. "Nobody is guilty who comes here. They can every one prove innocence clearly and at once. Notwithstanding, they nearly all hang, and frequently, for variety's sake, are drawn and quartered."

I waited about Newgate until 9 o'clock and as I passed out met Buckingham and his man Johnson, a sort of lawyer-knight, going in. I went down to the palace at Greenwich and, finding that the girls were still at Scotland palace, rode over at once to see them.

Upon getting Mary and Jane to myself I told them of Brandon's arrest on the charge of murder and of his condition, lying half dead from wounds and loss of blood in that frightful dungeon. The tale moved them greatly, and they both gave way to tears. I think Mary had heard of the arrest before, as she did not seem surprised.

"Do you think he will tell the cause of the killing?" she asked.

"I know he will not," I answered, "but I also know that he knows your will." And I looked straight into her face.

"Certainly we will," said Jane. "We will go to the king at once." And she was on the quiver to start immediately.

Mary did not at once consent to Jane's proposition, but sat in a reverie, looking with tearful eyes into vacancy, apparently absorbed in thought. After a little pressing from us she said, "I suppose it will have to be done—I can see no other way—but blessed Mother Mary, help me!"

The girls made hasty preparations, and we all started back to Greenwich, that Mary might tell the king. On the road over I stopped at Newgate to tell Brandon that the princess would soon have him out, knowing how welcome liberty would be at her hands, but I was not permitted to see him.

I swallowed my disappointment and thought it would be only a matter of a few hours' delay, the time spent in riding down to Greenwich and sending back a messenger. So, light hearted enough at the prospect, I soon joined the girls, and we cantered briskly home.

After waiting a reasonable time for Mary to see the king I sought her again to learn where and from whom I should receive the order for Brandon's release and when I should go to London to bring him.

What was my surprise and disgust when Mary told me she had not yet seen the king; that she had waited to "eat and bathe and dress" and that "a few moments more or less could make no difference."

"My God, your highness! Did I not tell you that the man who saved your

life and honor, who is covered with wounds received in your defense and almost dead from loss of blood, spilled that you might be saved from worse than death, is now lying in a rayless dungeon, a place of frightful filth, such as you would not walk across for all the wealth of London, bridge, is surrounded by loathsome, creeping things that would sicken you but to think of; is resting under a charge whose penal-

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ty is that he be hanged, drawn and quartered? And yet you stop to eat and bathe and dress! In God's name, Mary Tudor, of what stuff are you made? If he had waited but one little minute, had stopped for the drawing of a breath, had held back for but one faltering thought from the terrible odds of four swords to one, what would you now be? Think, princess; think!"

I was a little frightened at the length to which my feeling had driven me, but Mary took it all very well and said slowly and absentmindedly:

"You are right. I will go at once. I despise my selfish neglect. There is no other way—I have racked my brain—there is no other way. It must be done, and I will go at once and do it."

"And I will go with you," said I.

"I do not blame you," she said, "for doubting me since I have failed once. But you need not doubt me now. It shall be done, and without delay, regardless of the cost to me. I have thought and thought to find some other way to liberate him, but there is none. I will go this instant."

"And I will go with you, Lady Mary," said I doggedly.

She smiled at my persistency and took me by the hand, saying, "Come!"

We at once went off to find the king, but the smile had faded from Mary's face, and she looked as if she were going to execution. Every shade of color had fled, and her lips were the hue of ashes.

We found the king in the midst of his council, with the French ambassadors, discussing the all absorbing topic of the marriage treaty, and Henry, fearing an outbreak, refused to see the princess. As usual, opposition but spurred her determination, so she sat down in the anteroom and said she would not stir until she had seen the king.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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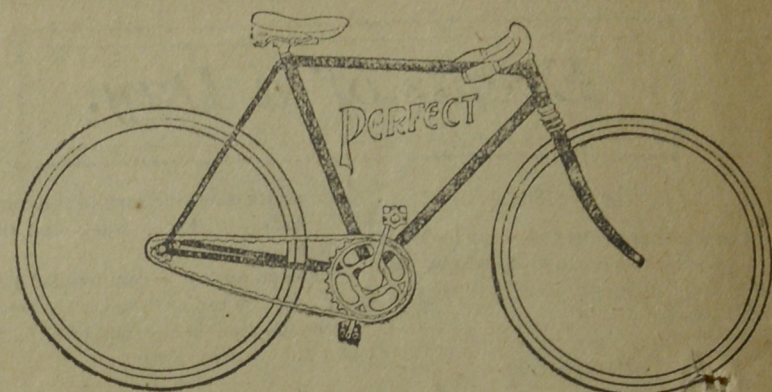
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