

Fair Margaret Castell.

BY H. RIDER HARGRAVE.
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CHAPTER I.

HOW PETER MET THE SPANIARD.

It was a spring afternoon in the sixth year of the reign of King Edward VII. of England. There had been a great show in London, for that day his Grace opened the newly convened Parliament, and announced to his faithful people—who received the news with much cheering, since war is ever popular at first—the intention of invading France and of leading the English armies in person.

In Parliament itself, it is true, the general enthusiasm was somewhat dashed when approval was made to the finding of the needful funds; but the crowds without, formed for the most part of persons who would not be called upon to pay the money, did not suffer the same fate. The gracious looks appeared, surrounded by his glittering escort of nobles and men-at-arms, they threw their caps into the air and shouted themselves hoarse.

The King himself, although he was still young in years, was a very noble-looking man, with a face, smiling a little sarcastically at his clamor; but remembering how glad he should be to hear it, who still sat upon a somewhat doubtful throne, said a few soft words, and sending for three or three of the leaders of the people, gave them his royal hand, and suffered certain children to touch his robe, the sign of his blessing of the Evil. Then, having passed a while to receive petitions from poor folk, which he handed to one of his officers to be read, amid renewed shouting he passed on to the great feast that was made ready in his palace of Westminster.

Among those who were near to him was the Ambassador de Ayala, accredited to the English court by the Spanish sovereigns, Ferdinand and Isabella, and his following of splendidly attired lords and secretaries. That Spain was much in favor there was evident from his place in the procession.

How could it be otherwise, indeed, seeing that already, four years or more before, at the age of twelve months, Prince Arthur, the eldest son of the King, had been formally affianced to the Infanta Catherine, daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella, aged one year and nine months? For in those days it was thought well that the effects of princes and princesses should be directed early into such paths as their royal parents and governors considered likely to prove most profitable to themselves.

At the Ambassador's left hand, mounted on a fine black horse and dressed richly, but simply, in black velvet, with a cap of the same material, in which was fastened a single pearl, rode a tall cavalier. He was about five and thirty years of age, and very handsome, having piercing black eyes and a stern, clean cut face.

In every man, it is said, there can be found a resemblance, often far off and fanciful enough, to some beast or bird or other creature, and certainly in this case it was not hard to discover. The man resembled an eagle, which, whether by chance or design, was the crest he bore upon his servants' livery and the trappings of his horse.

The unfencing eye, the hooked nose, the air of pride and mastery, the thin, long hand, the quick grace of movement, all suggested that king of birds, suggested also, as his motto said, that what he sought he would find, and that he would find it. Just now he was watching the morning star hanging luminous among the mists of dawn.

Also, although they were so gentle and modest, if that beholder chanced to be a man on the good side of fifty, it was often long before he could forget them, especially if he were privileged to see how they might be matched that pair of chestnut shading into black that waved above them and fell, trees upon trees, upon the shapely shoulders and down to the slender waist.

Peter Brome, for he was so named, looked a little anxiously about him at the crowd; then turning, addressed Margaret in his strong, clear voice. "There are rough folk around," he said; "do you think you should stop here? Your father might be angered, cousin."

"And his own too, sometimes, I believe," answered the Ambassador dryly. "But to be frank, what I do not understand about you, Señor D'Agular, is I know that you have a business in Spain—an accredited envoy to the Moors of Granada; the Señor D'Agular, a humble servant of Holy Church, and a good man, but what is this shod-upon the Church's business, and that of their Majesty?"

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"You find the scene strange, Marquis," said the Ambassador, glancing at him shrewdly.

"Señor, here in England, if it please your Excellency," he answered gravely. "Señor D'Agular, the Marquis you mentioned lives in Spain—an accredited envoy to the Moors of Granada; the Señor D'Agular, a humble servant of Holy Church, and a good man, but what is this shod-upon the Church's business, and that of their Majesty?"

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humbly craved a title of the country's wealth to fight the country's war.

"Yes, and I saw him turn pale and tremble at the rough voices, as though their echoes shook his throne. I tell you, Excellency, that the time will come in this land when those Commons will be king."

"Look now at that fellow whom his Grace holds by the hand, calling him 'sir' and 'master,' and yet whom he knows to be, as I do, a heretic, a Jew in disguise, whose sins, if he had his rights, should be purged by fire. Why, to my knowledge, last night that Israelite said things against the Church—"

"Whereof the Church, or its servant, doubtless made notes to be used when the time comes," broke in de Ayala. "But the audience is done, and his Highness beckons us forward to the feast, where there will be no heretics to vex us, and, as it is Lent, not much to eat. Come, Señor, for we stop the way."

Three hours had gone by, and the sun sank redly, for even at that spring season it was cold upon the marshy lands of Westminster, and there was frost in the air. On the open space, in the banquetting hall, in front of which were gathered squires and grooms with horses, stood and walked many citizens of London, who, their day's work done, came to see the King pass by in state.

Among these were a man and a lady, the latter with long and wavy hair, a young woman, who were all three sufficiently striking in appearance to attract some notice in the throng. The man, a person of about 30 years of age, dressed in a merchant's robe of cloth, and wearing a knife in his girdle, seemed over six feet in height, and was dressed in a very simple, but trimmed cloak, was, for a woman, also of unusual stature.

He was not, strictly speaking, a handsome man, being somewhat too high of forehead and prominent of feature; moreover, one of his clean shaven cheeks, the right, was marked by the long, and scarred, and cut out which stretched from the temple to the strong chin. His face, however, was open and manly, if rather stern, and the gray eyes were steady and frank.

It was not the face of a merchant, but rather that of one of good degree, accustomed to command and war. For the rest, the figure was well built and active, and his voice when he spoke, which was seldom, clear and distinct to loudness, but cultivated and pleasant—again, not the voice of a merchant.

Of the lady's figure little could be seen because of the long cloak that hid it, but the face which appeared within its hood when she turned and the dying sunlight filled her eyes was lovely indeed, for from her birth to her death day Margaret Castell—Fair Margaret, as she was called—had this gift to a degree that is rarely granted to woman.

Rounded and flowerlike that face, most delicately tinted also, with rich and curling lips and a broad, snow white brow. But the wonder of it, what distinguished her above everything else from other beautiful women of her time, was to be found in her eyes, for these were not blue or grey, as might have been expected from her general coloring, but large, black and lustrous, set, too, as the eyes of a deer, and overhung by curving lashes of an ebony black.

The effect of these eyes of hers shining above those tinted cheeks and beneath the brow of ivory whiteness was so strange as to be almost startling. They caught the beholder and held him, as might the sudden flash of lightning, or the gleam of the morning star hanging luminous among the mists of dawn.

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for a few moments Peter and Betty were unable to escape from the mob which closed in behind her, and thus it came about that Margaret found herself alone among these people, in the midst, indeed, of the guard of the Spanish Ambassador de Ayala, men who were notorious for their lawlessness, for they reckoned upon their master's privilege to protect them. Also, for the most part, they were just then more or less in liquor.

One of these fellows, a great, red haired Scotchman, whom the priest-diplomatist had brought with him from that country, where he had also been Ambassador, suddenly perceiving a woman who appeared to be young and pretty before him, determined to examine her more closely, and to this end made use of a rude stratagem.

Pretending to stumble, he grasped at Margaret's cloak as though to save himself, and with a wrench tore it open, revealing her beautiful face and graceful figure.

"A dove, comrades—a dove!" he shouted in a voice thick with drink, "who has flown from the nest, my friends, and is now in long arms about her, he strove to draw her to him.

"Peter! Help me, Peter!" cried Margaret, as she struggled fiercely in his grip.

"No, no, if you want a saint, my bonny lass," said the drunken Scotchman, "Andrew is the good Peter," at which witticism those of the others who understood him laughed, for the man's name was Andrew.

Next instant they laughed again, and to the ruffian Andrew it seemed as though suddenly he had fallen into the power of a whirlwind. At least Margaret was wrenched from his grasp, and he was hurled back and round to fall violently upon his face.

"That's Peter," exclaimed one of the soldiers in Spanish.

"Yes," answered another, "and a patron saint worth having," while a third pulled the rucumbent Andrew to his feet.

The mob looked at which witticism those of the others who understood him laughed, for the man's name was Andrew.

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the girl was thrust forward to him.

"Sir," said the man, "and he pointed to the shape of Andrew, "tried to do wrong to this maiden, John Castell's child. I her cousin, threw him down. He drew his sword and tried to kill me, and I killed him with my staff. See, it lies there. Then the Spaniards—his comrades—would have cut me down, and I called for English help. That is all."

"The King looked him up and down.

"A merchant by your dress," he said, "but soldier by your mien. How are you named?"

"Peter Brome, sir."

"Ah! There was a certain Sir Peter Brome who fell at Bowthorpe Field—not fighting for me," he smiled. "Did you know him perchance?"

"No, my father, sir, and I saw him slain—aye, and the slayer."

"Well can I believe it," answered Henry, looking at him. "But how comes it that Peter Brome's son, who wears that battle scar across his face, is clad in merchant's woolen?"

"Sir," said Peter, coolly, "my father sold his lands, laid all to the Crown and I have never rendered the account. Therefore I must live as I can."

The King laughed outright as he replied: "I like you, Peter Brome, though doubtless you hate me."

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through which no thief could break, and filled with precious things.

However this might be, certainly in that great house, which in the time of the Plantagenets had been the fortified palace of a noble, existed chambers whereof he alone knew the secret, no one else, not even his daughter or Peter, ever crossed their threshold. Also, there stood in a number of men servants, very stout fellows, who wore knives or swords beneath their cloaks and watched at night to see that all was quiet.

For the rest the living rooms of this house were Castell, Margaret, his daughter, and Peter dwelt very large and comfortable, being well paneled with oak after the Tudor fashion, and having green windows that looked out upon the garden.

When Peter and Betty reached the door, not that which led into the shop, but another, it was to find that Margaret and D'Agular, who were walking very quietly, must have already passed it, since it was shut and they had vanished. At his knock—a hard one—a serving man opened and Peter entered into the room.

"What is the matter, sir?" asked the man, who had thrown off her cloak, stood warming herself at the fire, and the Señor D'Agular, comfortably seated in a high chair, which he seemed to have known for years, leaned back, his bonnet in his hand, and watched her idly.

Facing them stood John Castell, a stout, dark bearded man of between 30 and 40 years of age, with a clean cut face and piercing black eyes. Now, in the privacy of his home he was very richly attired in a robe trimmed with the costliest fur and fastened with a gold chain that had a jewel in its clasp.

When Castell served in his shop or sat in his counting house no merchant in London was more plainly dressed; but at night, loving magnificence at heart, it was his custom to indulge it, even when there was none to see him. From the way in which he stood and the look upon his face, Peter knew at once that he was much disturbed.

Hearing his step Castell whisked around and addressed him at once in a clear, decided voice, which was his characteristic: "What is this I am told, Peter? A man killed by you before the palace gates? A broil? A public riot in which things went near to great bloodshed between the English, with you at the head of them, and the bodyguard of his Excellency, de Ayala? You arrested by the King, and bailed out by this señor?"

"Quite," answered Peter calmly.

"Then I am ruined; we are all ruined. Oh! it was an evil hour when I took one of your bloodshirts today into my house. What have you to say?"

"Only that I want my supper," said Peter. "Those who began the story can finish it. For I think their tongues are nimbler than my own," and he glanced wrathfully at Margaret, who laughed outright, while even the solemn D'Agular smiled.

"Father," broke in Margaret, "do not be angry with Cousin Peter, whose only fault is that he hits too hard. It is I who am to blame, for I wished to stop to see the King against his will and Betty's, and then—then that brute, and her eyes filled with tears of shame and anger, 'ought hold of me, and Peter threw him down, and I was left when he attacked him with a sword, Peter killed him with his staff, and—all the rest happened."

"It was beautifully done," said D'Agular in his soft voice and foreign accent. "I saw it all, and made sure that you were dead. The party I understood, but the way of it was so smashing a blow in before he could thrust again—ah! that was good."

"Well, well," said Castell, "let us eat first and talk afterward. Señor D'Agular, you will honor my poor board, will you not, though it is hard to come from a king's feast to a merchant's fare?"

"It is I who am honored," answered D'Agular; "and as for the feast, his Grace is sparing in this Lenten season. At least I could get little to eat, and, therefore, like the Señor Peter, I am starved."

Castell rang a silver bell which stood near by, whereupon servants brought in the meal, which was excellent and plentiful. What the merchant went to the cupboard in the wainscoting and took thence two flasks, which he uncorked himself with care, saying that he would give the señor some wine of his own country.

This done he sat Latin grace and crossed himself, an action which D'Agular followed, remarking that he was glad to find that he was in the house of a good Christian.

"What else did you think that I should be?" asked Castell, glancing at him shrewdly.

"I did not think at all, señor," he answered; "but, alas! every one is not a Christian. In Spain, for instance, we have many Moors and—Jews."

"I know," said Castell, "for I traded with them both."

"Then you have never visited Spain?"

"No; I am an English merchant. But try that wine, señor; it came from Granada and they say that it is good."

business; you, and you upon his trial for causing the man's death. Remember, he was in the service of De Ayala, with whom your legs were to stand, and De Ayala, it seems to me, is very angry."

Now Margaret grew frightened, for the thought that harm might come to Peter out of her heart. The color left her cheek and once again her eyes swam with tears.

"Oh! say not so," she exclaimed. "Peter, will you not fly at once?"

"By no means," he answered decidedly. "Did I not say it to the King, and is not this foreign lord fond for me?"

"What can be done?" she went on; then as a thought struck her, turned to D'Agular and clasping her slender hands, looked pleadingly into his face and asked: "Señor, who are so powerful and the friend of great people, will you not help us?"

"Am I not here to do so, Señora? Although I think that a man who can call half London to his back, as I saw your cousin do, needs little help from me."

"But listen, my country has two Ambassadors at this court—De Ayala, the friend of the King; and strangely enough De Puebla does not love De Ayala. Yet he does love money, which perhaps will be forthcoming."

"Now, if a charge is to be laid over this brawl it will probably be done by the clergy. No means, no ill, but through De Puebla, who knows your laws and court, and—do you understand me, Señor Castell?"

"Yes," answered the merchant, "but how am I to get at De Puebla? If I were to offer him money he would only ask more."

"I see that you know his Excellency," remarked D'Agular. "You are right, but money must be offered; a present must be made after the pardon is delivered—no before. Oh, De Puebla knows in London as it is among the Jews and infidels of Granada and the merchants of Seville, at both of which places I travel. De Puebla's credit flickered, but he was only answered:

"Maybe; but how shall I approach him, señor?"

"If you will permit me, that is my task. Now, to what amount will you go to save your life, or more from inconvenience? Fifty gold angels?"

"It is too much," said Castell; "a knave like that is not worth ten. Indeed he was an ass, and nothing should be paid at all."

"Ah! señor, the merchant is coming out in you; also the dangerous man who thinks he has no ill will to bring the world, not kings—I mean might. The knave is worth nothing, but De Puebla's word in Henry's ear is worth much."

"Fifty angels be it, then," said Castell. "And I thank you, señor, for your good offices. Will you take the money now?"

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castles have their courts. Among other matters he writes thus: "I have heard that a certain one whose name I will not mention even in cipher, a very powerful and high born man, and, although he appears to be a pleasure seeker only, and is certainly of a dissolute life, among the greatest bigots in all Spain, has been sent, or is shortly to be sent, from Granada, where he is stationed to watch the Moors as an envoy to the court of England to conclude a secret treaty with his King."

"Under this treaty the names of rich Marquises that are already well known here are to be restored, so that when the time comes that the strict prosecution of Jews and Marranos begins, they may be given up and allowed to Spain for trial before the Inquisition."

"Also he is to arrange that no Jew or Marrano may be allowed to take refuge in England. This is for your information, that you may warn any whom it concerns."

"You think that D'Agular is this man?" asked Peter, while Castell folded up the letter and hid it in a pocket of his robe.

"I do; indeed I have heard already that a fox was on the prowl and that men should look out for themselves. Peter, did you not know he crossed himself like a good Christian?"

"Also, it is Lent and a fast day, and by ill fortune, although none of us ate of it, there was meat upon the table, for, as you know, he added hurriedly, "I am not strict in such matters, who give little weight to forms and ceremonies."

"Well, he observed it and touched fish only, although he drank enough of the sweet wine. Doubtless a report of that meat will go to Spain by the next courier."

"And if it does, what matter? We are in England, not in Spain. Perhaps the Señor D'Agular learned as much as that to-night upon the banquetting hall. There is something to be feared from this brawl at home; but while we are safe in London, no more from Spain."

"I am no coward, but I think there is something to be feared. Peter, I think the arm of the Pope is long and the arm of the crafty Ferdinand is longer, and both of them pre- pare for the threats and money bags of heretics."

"Well, sir, we are not heretics," he said. "No, perhaps not heretics; but we are rich and the father of one of us was a Jew, and the other was a Moor. Perhaps the Lord, even a true son of Holy Church might desire, and he looked at the door through which Margaret had passed to her chamber."

Peter understood, for his long arms moved uneasily and his gray eyes flashed. "I will go to bed," he said; "I wish to think."

"Nay, lad," answered Castell, "fill your glass and stay a while. I have words to say to you, and there is no time like the present. Who knows what may happen to-morrow?"

(To be continued.)

QUEEN ALEXANDRA'S MAIDS.

Four of Them, All Young, Pretty and Accomplished.

The position of maid of honor to the Queen is the most coveted distinction at the Court of King Edward. Although far from being a sinecure, the position has been made so much easier by the kindness and tact of Queen Alexandra, and the advantages of being in the court circle are so many that an appointment of this kind is looked upon as a bit of rare good fortune.

Queen Alexandra's household consists of only fifteen ladies and six men—in striking contrast with that of the King, which says a writer in *Town and Country*, includes more than a hundred individuals.

Queen Victoria had eight maids of honor, of whom two were always in waiting; but Queen Alexandra's known desire for a less stately life has prompted her to reduce the number to four.

Queen Alexandra delights to surround herself with quite young, bright and clever people, and all four maids are still in their early youth.

The tradition is that these young women invariably marry well.

Their position at court brings them into contact with highly eligible partners; and an old custom dating back for centuries prompts their royal mistress to provide a dowry of \$5,000 on their wedding day. The dowry consists of a magnificent gown of honor a great event in the London season.

When the Queen holds a drawing room for the presentation of debutantes and the dress of the court is the most elaborate, the maids walk in the royal procession to the Throne Room, and stand immediately around her Majesty's coronation.