Thus the royal wrath was appeased to such an extent that the order for expulsion was modified to a command that there be no more quartet gatherings in Lady Mary's parlor. This leniency was more easy for the Princess to bring about by reason of the fact that she had not spoken to her brother since the day she went to see him after Wolsey's visit, and had been so roughly driven off. At first, upon her refusal to speak to him—after the Wolsey visit—Henry was angry on account of what he called her insolence; but as she did not seem to care for that, and as his anger did nothing toward unsealing her lips, he pretended indifference. Still the same stubborn silence was maintained. This soon began to amuse the King, and of late he had been trying to be on friendly terms again with his sister through a series of elephantine antics and bearlike pleasantries, which were the most dismal failures—that is, in the way of bringing about a reconciliation. They were more successful from a comical point of view. So Henry was really glad for something that would loosen the tongue usually so lively, and for an opportunity to gratify his sister from whom he was demanding such a sacrifice, and for whom he expected to receive no less a price than the help of Louis of France, the most powerful King of Europe, to the imperial crown.

Thus our meetings were broken up, and Brandon knew his dream was over, and that any effort to see the Princess would probably result in disaster for them both; for him certainly.

The King upon that same day told Mary of the intercepted letter sent by her to Brandon at Newgate, and accused her of what he was pleased to term an improper feeling for a jew-born fellow.

Mary at once sent a full account of the communication in a letter to Brandon, who read it with no small degree of ill comfort as the harbinger of trouble.

"I had better leave here soon, or I may go without my head," he remarked. "When that thought gets to working in the King's brain he will strike, and I—shall fall."

Letters began to come to our rooms from Mary, at first begging Brandon to come to her, and then upbraiding him because of his coldness and cowardice, and telling him that if he cared for her as she did for him he would see her, though he had to wade through fire and blood. That was exactly where the trouble lay; it was not fire and blood through which he would have to pass; they were small matters, mere nothing that would really have added zest and interest to the achievement. But the frowning laugh of the tyrant, who could bind him hand and foot, and a vivid remembrance of the Newgate dungeon, with a dangling noose or a hollowed out block in the near background, were matters that would have taken the adventurous tenderness out of even the cracked brain of chivalry itself. Brandon cared only to fight where there was a possible victory or ransom, or a prospect of some sort, at least, of achieving success. Bayard preferred a stone wall, and thought to show his brains out several centuries before Bayard and in a sense he could do it. * * * What a pity this senseless, stiff-kneed, light-headed chivalry did not beat its brains out several centures before Bayard put such an absurd price upon himself.

So every phase of the question which his good sense presented told Brandon, whose passion was as ardent though not so impatient as Mary's, that it would be worse than foolhardy to try to see her. He, however, determined to see her once more before he left, but as it could in all probability be only once, he was reserving the meeting until the last, and had written Mary that it was their best and only chance.

This brought to Mary a stinging realization of the fact that Brandon was about to leave her and that she would lose him if something were not done quickly. Now for Mary, after a life of gratified whims, to lose the very thing she wanted most of all—that for which she would willingly have given up every other desire her heart had ever coined—was a thought hardly to be endured. She felt that the world would surely collapse. It could not, would not, should not be.

Her vigorous young nerves were too strong to be benumbed by an overwhelming agony, as is sometimes the case with those who are fortunate enough to be weaker, so she had to suffer and endure. Life itself, yes, life a thousand times, was slipping away from her. She must be doing something or she would perish. Poor Mary! How a grand soul like hers, full of faults and weakness, can suffer. What an infinite disproportion between her susceptibility to pain and her power to combat it. She had the maximum capacity for one and the minimum strength for the other. No wonder it drove her almost mad—that excruciating pang of love.

She could not endure inaction, so she did the worst thing possible. She went alone one afternoon, just before dusk, to see Brandon at our rooms. I was not there when she first went in, but, having seen her on the way, suspected something and followed, arriving two or three minutes after her. I knew it was best that I should be present, and I am sure Brandon would wish it. When I entered they were holding each other's hands, in silence. They had not yet found their tongues, so full and crowded were their hearts. It was pathetic to see them, especially the girl, who had not Brandon's hopelessness to deaden the pain by partial resignation.

Upon my entrance she dropped his hands and turned quickly toward me with a frightened look, but was reassured upon seeing who it was. Brandon mechanically walked away from her and seated himself on a stool. Mary, as mechanically, moved to his side and placed her hand on his shoulder. Turning her face toward me, she said: "Sir Edwin, I know you will forgive me when I tell you that we have a great deal to say and wish to be alone."

I was about to go when Brandon stopped me.

"No, no; Caskoden, please stay; it would not do. It would be bad enough, God knows, if the Princess should be found here with both of us; but, with me alone, I should be dead before morning. There is danger enough as it is, for they will watch us."

Mary knew he was right, but she could not resist a vicious little glance toward me, who was in no way to blame.

Presently we all moved into the window-way, where Brandon and Mary sat upon the great cloak and I on a campstool in front of them, completely filling up the little passage.

"I can bear this no longer," exclaimed Mary. "I will go to my brother to-night and tell him all; I will tell him how I suffer, and that I shall die if you are allowed to go away and leave me forever. He loves me, and I can do anything with him when I try. I know I can obtain his consent to our—our—marriage. He cannot know how I suffer, else he would not treat me so. I will let him see—I will convince him. I have in my mind everything I want to say and do. I will sit on his knee and stroke his hair and kiss him." And she laughed softly as her spirit revived in the breath of a growing hope. "Then I will tell him how handsome he is, and how I hear the ladies sighing for him, and he will come around all right by the third visit. Oh, I know how to do it; I have done it so often. Never fear! I wish I had gone at it long ago."

Her enthusiastic fever of hope was really contagious, but Brandon, whose life was at stake, had his wits quickened by the danger.

"Mary, would you like to see me a corpse before to-morrow noon?" he asked.

"Why! of course not. Why do you ask such a dreadful question?"

"Because, if you wish to make sure of it do what you have just said—go to the King and tell him all. I doubt if he could wait till morning, but believe he would awaken me at midnight to put me to sleep forever—at the end of a rope or on a block pillow."

"Oh! no! you are all wrong; I know what I can do with Henry."

"If that is the case, I say good-by now, for I shall be out of England, if possible, by midnight. You must promise me that you will not only not go to the King at all about this matter, but that you will guard your tongue jealous of its slightest word, and remember with every breath that on your prudence hangs my life, which, I know, is dear to you. Do you promise? If you do not, I must fly; so you will lose me one way or the other. If you tell the King, either by my flight or by my death."

"I promise," said Mary, with drooping head, the embodiment of despair; all life and hope having left her again.

After a few minutes her face brightened, and she asked Brandon what ship he would sail in for New Spain, and whence.

"We sail in the Royal Hind, from Bristol, in about a fortnight," he replied.

"How many go out in her, and are there any women?"

"No! no!" he returned; "no woman could make the trip; and besides, on ships of that sort, half pirate, half merchant, they do not take women. The sailors are superstitious about it and will not sail with them. They say they bring bad luck—adverse winds, calms, storms, blackness, monsters from the deep and victorious foes."

"The ignorant creatures!" cried Mary.

Brandon continued: "There will be a hundred men, if the captain can induce so many to enlist."

"How does one procure passage?" inquired Mary.

"By enlisting with the captain, a man named Bradhurst, at Bristol, where the ship is now lying. There is where I enlisted by letter. But why do you ask?"

"Oh, I only wanted to know."

We talked a while on various topics, but Mary always brought the conversation back to the same subject, the Royal Hind and New Spain. After asking many questions, she sat in silence for a time, and then abruptly broke into one of my sentences—she was always interrupting me as if I were a parrot.

"I have been thinking and have made up my mind what I will do, and you shall not dissuade me. I will go to New Spain with you. That will be glorious—far better than the humdrum life of sitting at home—and will solve the whole question."

"But that would be impossible, Mary," said Brandon, into whose face this new evidence of her regard had brought a brightening look; utterly impossible. To begin with, no woman could stand the voyage, not even you, strong and vigorous as you are."

"Oh, yes, I can, and I will not allow you to stop me for that reason. I could bear any hardship better than the torture of the last few weeks. In truth, I cannot bear this at all; it is killing me, so what would it be when you are gone and I am the wife of Louis? Think of that, Charles Brandon; think of that, when I am the wife of Louis. Even if the voyage kills me, I might as well die one way as another; and then I should be with you, where it were sweet to die." And I had to sit there and listen to all this foolish talk!

Brandon insisted: "But no women are going. As I told you, they would not take one; besides, how could you escape? I will answer the first question you ever asked me. You are of sufficient consideration about the court for all your movements to attract notice. It is impossible; we must not think of it; it cannot be done. Why build up hopes only to be cast down?"

"Oh, but it can be done; never doubt it. I will go, not as a woman, but as a man. I have planned all the details while sitting here. To-morrow I will send to Bristol a sum of money asking a separate room in the ship for a young nobleman who wishes to go to New Spain incognito, and will go aboard just before they sail. I will buy a man's complete outfit, and will practice being a man before you and Sir Edwin." Here she blushed so that I could see the scarlet even in the gathering gloom. She continued: "As to my escape, I can go to Windsor, and then perhaps on to Berkeley Castle, over by Reading, where there will be no one to watch or care to leave at once, and there will be no cause for them to spy upon me when you are gone, so it can be done easily enough. That is it; I will go to my sister, who is now at Berkeley Castle, the other side of Reading, you know, and that will make a shorter ride to Bristol when we start."

The thought, of course, could not but please Brandon, to whom, in the warmth of Mary's ardor, it had almost begun to offer hope. And he said musingly: "I wonder if it could be done? If it could—if we could reach New Spain we might build ourselves a home in the beautiful green mountains and hide ourselves safely away from all the world, in the lap of some cozy valley, rich with nature's bounteous gift of fruit and flowers, shaded from the hot sun and sheltered from the blasts, and live in a little paradise of our own. What a glorious dream; but it is only a dream, and we had better awake from it."

Brandon must have been insane!

"No! no! it is not a dream," interrupted she with bright, determined Mary; "it is not a dream; it shall be a reality. How glorious it will be; I can see our little house now nestling among the hills, shaded by great spreading trees with flowers and vines and golden fruit all about it, rich plumaged birds and gorgeous butterflies. Oh! I can hardly wait. Who would live in a musty palace when they have within reach such a home, and that, too, with you?"

Here it was again. I thought that interview would be the death of me.

Brandon held his face in his hands, and then looking up said: "It is only a question of your happiness, and hard as the voyage and your life over there would be, yet I believe it would be better than life with Louis of France. Nothing could be so terrible as that to both of us. If you wish to go I will try to take you, though I die in the attempt. There will be ample time to reconsider, so that you can turn back if you wish."

Her reply was inarticulate, though satisfactory; and she took his hand in hers as the tears ran gently down her cheeks; this time tears of joy—the first she had shed for many a day.

In the Siren country again without wax! Overboard and lost!

Yes, Brandon's resolution not to see Mary was well taken, if it could only have been as well kept. Observe, as we progress, into what the breaking of it led and resent and use