

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

Re-written and Rendered into Modern English from Sir Edwin Caskoden's Memoir

By EDWIN CASKODEN [CHARLES MAJOR]

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CONTINUED.

Out they stepped upon the polished floor, he holding her hand in his, awaiting the pause in the music to take the step. I shall never forget the sight of those two standing there together—Mary, dark eyed and glowing; Brandon, almost rosy, with eyes that held the color of a dark spring sky and a wealth of flowing curls crowning his six feet of perfect manhood, strong and vigorous as a young lion. Mary, full of beauty curves and graces, a veritable Venus in her teens, and Brandon, an Apollo, with a touch of Hercules, were a complement each to the other that would surely make a perfect one.

When the music started, off they went, heel and toe, bow and courtesy, a step forward and a step back, in perfect time and rhythm—a poem of human motion. Could Brandon dance? The princess had her answer in the first ten steps. Nothing could be more graceful than Brandon's dancing. Once it were Mary's. Her slightest movement was grace itself. When she would throw herself backward in thrusting out her toe and then swing forward with her head a little to one side, her uplifted arm undulating like the white neck of a swan—for her sleeve, which was slit to the shoulder, fell back and left it bare—she was a sight worth a long journey to see. And when she looked up to Brandon with a laugh in her brown eyes and a curving smile just parting her full, red lips that a man would give his very luck to—but I had better stop.

"Was there ever a goodlier couple?" I asked Jane, by whose side I sat.

"Never," she responded as she played, and, strange to say, I was jealous because she agreed with me. I was jealous because I feared it was Brandon's beauty to which she referred. That I thought would naturally appeal to her. Had he been less handsome I should perhaps have thought nothing of it, but I knew what my feelings were toward Mary, and I judged, or rather misjudged, Jane by myself. I supposed she would think of Brandon as I could not help thinking of Mary.

Was anything in heaven or earth ever so beautiful as that royal creature dancing there, daintily holding up her skirts with thumb and first finger, just far enough to show a distracting little foot and ankle and make one wish he had been born a sheep rather than a sentient man who had to live without Mary Tudor? Yet, strange as it may seem, I was really and wholly in love with Jane. In fact, I loved no one but Jane, and my feeling of intense admiration for Mary was but a part of man's composite inconstancy.

A woman—God bless her!—if she really loves a man, has no thought of any other one at a time is all sufficient—but a man may love one woman with the warmth of a simoon and at the same time feel like a good, healthy south wind toward a dozen others. That is the difference between a man and a woman—the difference between the good and the bad. One average woman has enough goodness in her to supply an army of men.

Mary and Brandon went on dancing long after Jane was tired of playing. It was plain to see that the girl was thoroughly enjoying it. They kept up a running fire of small talk and laughed and smiled and bowed and courted, all in perfect time and grace.

It is more difficult than you may think, if you have never tried, to keep up a conversation and dance La Galliard at the same time—one is apt to balk the other. But Brandon's dancing was as easy to him as walking, and, although so small a matter, I could see it raised him vastly in the estimation of both girls.

"Do you play triumph?" I heard Mary ask in the midst of the dancing.

"Oh, yes," replied Brandon, much to my delight, as the princess threw a mischievous, knowing glance over her shoulder to see if I had heard. She at once saw I had, and this, of course, settled the wager.

"And," continued Brandon, "I also play the new game, honor and risk, which is more interesting than triumph."

"Oh, do you?" cried Mary. "That will more than compensate for the loss of my 10 crowns. Let us sit down at once. I have been wishing to learn, but no one here seems to know it. In France, they say, it is the only game. I suppose there is where you learned it. Perhaps you know their new dances too. I have heard they are delightful."

danced that way," she replied, with a fluttering little laugh, looking up into his face with a half shy, half apologetic manner and then dropping her lashes before his gaze.

"Oh, well!" said Brandon, with a Frenchman's shrug of the shoulders, and then moved off as if about to leave the floor.

"But is that really the way you they dance it—with your—your arm around my—a lady's waist?"

"I should not have dared venture upon such a familiarity otherwise," answered Brandon, with a glimmer of a smile playing around his lips and hiding in his eyes.

Mary saw this shadowy smile and said: "Oh, I fear your modesty will cause you hurt. I am beginning to believe you would dare do anything you wish. I more than half suspect you are a very bold man, notwithstanding your smooth, modest manner."

"You do me foul wrong, I assure you. I am the soul of modesty, and grieve that you should think me bold," said Brandon, with a broadening smile.

Mary interrupted him. "Now, I do believe you are laughing at me—at my prudery, I suppose you think it."

Mary would rather have been called a fool than a prude, and I think she was right. Prudery is no more a sign of virtue than a wig is of hair. It is usually put on to hide a bald place.

The princess stood irresolute for a moment in evident hesitation and annoyance.

"You are grieving because I think you bold. And yet you stand there laughing at me to my face. I think so more than ever now. I know it. Oh, you make me angry! Don't! I do not like persons who anger me and then laugh at me." This turned Brandon's smile into a laugh, which he could not hold back.

Mary's eyes shot fire, and she stamped her foot, exclaiming: "Sir, this goes beyond all bounds! I will not tolerate your boldness another moment." I thought she was going to dismiss him, but she did not. The time had come when he or she must be the master.

It was a battle royal between the forces on the floor, and I enjoyed it and felt that Brandon would come out all right.

He said good humoredly: "What! Shall you have all the laugh in your sleeve at my expense? Do you expect to bring me here to win a wager for you made on the assumption of my stupidity and lack of social accomplishments and then complain when it comes my turn to laugh? I think I am the one who should be offended, but you see I am not."

"Caskoden, did you tell him?" demanded Mary, evidently referring to the wager.

"He said not a word of it," broke in Brandon, answering for me. "I should have been a dunder head indeed not to have seen it myself after what you said about the loss of your 10 crowns. So let us cry quits and begin again."

Mary reluctantly struck her flag.

"Very well, I am willing," she said laughingly; "but, as to your boldness, I still insist upon that. I forgive you, however, this time." Then, half apologetically, "After all, it is not such a grievous charge to make. I believe it never yet injured any man with women. They rather like it, I am afraid, however angry it makes them. Don't they, Jane?"

Jane, of course, did not know, so we all laughed, as usual, upon the slightest pretext, and Mary, that fair bundle of contradictions and quick transitions, stepped boldly up to Brandon, with her colors flying in her cheeks, ready for the first lesson in the new dance.

She was a little frightened at his arm around her waist, for the embrace was new to her—the first touch of man—and was shy and coy, though willing, being determined to learn the dance. She was an apt pupil and soon glided softly and gracefully around the room with unfeigned delight, yielding to the new situation more easily as she became accustomed to it.

"This dance was livelier exercise than La Galliard, and Mary could not talk much for lack of breath. Brandon kept the conversation going, though, and she answered with glances, smiles, nods

and monosyllables, a very good vocabulary in its way, and a very good way, too, for that matter.

Once he said something to her in a low voice, which brought a flush to her cheeks and caused her to glance quickly up into his face. By the time her answer came they were nearer us, and I heard her say: "I am afraid I shall have to forgive you again if you are not careful. Let me see an exhibition of that modesty you so much boast." But a smile and a flash of the eyes went with the words and took all the sting out of them.

After a time the dancers stopped, and Mary, with flushed face and sparkling eyes, sank into a chair, exclaiming: "The new dance is delightful, Jane. It is like flying, your partner helps you so. But what would the king say—and the queen? She would simply swoon with horror. It is delightful, though." Then, with more confusion in her manner than I had ever before seen, "That is, it is delightful if one chooses her partner."

This only made matters worse and gave Brandon an opportunity.

"Dare I hope?" he asked, with a deferential bow.

"Oh, yes; you may hope. I tell you frankly it was delightful with you. Now, are you satisfied, my modest one? Jane, I see we have a forward body here. No telling what he will be at next," said Mary, with evident impatience, rapidly swaying her fan. She spoke almost sharply, for Brandon's attitude was more that of an equal than she was accustomed to, and her royal dignity, which was the artificial part of her, rebelled against it now and then in spite of her real inclinations. The habit of receiving only adulation and living on a pinnacle above everybody else was so strong from continued practice that it appealed to her as a duty to maintain that elevation. She had never before been called upon to exert herself in that direction, and the situation was new. The servile ones with whom she usually associated maintained it for her; so she now felt, whenever she thought of it, that she was in duty bound to clamber back, at least part of the way, to her dignity, however pleasant it was personally down below in the denser atmosphere of informality.

In her heart the princess preferred, upon proper occasions, such as this, to abate her dignity, and often requested others to do so with ceremony, as in fact she had done with us earlier in the evening. But Brandon's easy manner, although perfectly respectful and elegantly polite, was very different from anything she had ever known. She enjoyed it, but every now and then the sense of her importance and dignity—for you must remember she was the first princess of the blood royal—would supersede even her love of enjoyment, and the girl went down and the princess came up. Besides, she half feared that Brandon was amusing himself at her expense, and that in fact this was a new sort of masculine worm. Really she sometimes doubted if it were a worm at all, and did not know what to expect nor what she ought to do.

She was far more girl than princess, and would have preferred to remain merely girl and let events take the course they were going, for she liked it. But there was the other part of her which was princess, and which kept saying, "Remember who you are," so she was plainly at a loss between natural and artificial inclinations contending unconsciously within her.

Replying to Mary's remark over Jane's shoulder, Brandon said:

"Your highness asked us to lay aside ceremony for the evening, and if I have offended I can but make for my excuse my desire to please you. Be sure I shall offend no more." This was said so seriously that his meaning could not be misunderstood. He did not care whether he pleased so capricious a person or not.

Mary made no reply, and it looked as if Brandon had the worst of it.

We sat a few minutes talking, Mary wearing an air of dignity. Cards were proposed, and as the game progressed she gradually unbent again and became affable and familiar as earlier in the evening. Brandon, however, was frozen. He was polite, dignified and deferential to the ladies, but the spirit of the evening was gone since he had furnished it all with his free, offhand manner, full of life and brightness.

After a short time, Mary's warning mood falling to thaw our frozen fun-maker, and in her heart infinitely preferring pleasure to dignity, she said: "Oh, this is wearisome! Your game is far less entertaining than your new dance. Do something to make me laugh, Master Brandon."

"I fear you must call in Will Sommers," he replied; "if you wish to laugh. I cannot please you in both ways, so will hold to the one which seems to suit the princess."

Mary's eyes flashed, and she said ironically:

"That sounds very much as though

you cared to please me in any way." Her lips parted, and she evidently had something unkind ready to say, but she held the breath she had taken to speak it with and after one or two false starts in as many different lines continued: "But perhaps I deserve it. I ask you to forgive me, and hereafter desire you three, upon all proper occasions, when we are by ourselves, to treat me as one woman—as a woman, a girl, I mean. Where is the virtue of royalty if it only means being put upon a pinnacle above all the real pleasures of life, like foolish old Stylites on his column? The queen is always preaching to me about the strict maintenance of my 'dignity royal,' as she calls it, and perhaps she is right. But out upon 'dignity royal,' say I! It is a terrible nuisance. Oh, you don't know how difficult it is to be a princess and not a fool. There!" And she sighed in apparent relief.

Then, turning to Brandon: "You have taught me another good lesson, sir, and from this hour you are my friend, if you will be, so long as you are worthy—no, I do not mean that; I know you will always be worthy—but forever. Now we are at rights again. Let us try to remain so—that is, I will," and she laughingly gave him her hand, which he, rising to his feet, bowed low over and kissed, rather fervently and lingeringly, I thought.

Hand kissing was new to us in England, excepting in case of the king and queen at public homage. It was a little startling to Mary, though she permitted him to hold her hand much longer than there was any sort of need—a fact she recognized, as I could easily see from her telltale cheeks, which were rosy with the thought of it.

So it is when a woman goes on the defensive prematurely and without cause. It makes it harder to apply the check when the real need comes.

After a little card playing I expressed regret to Jane that I could not have a dance with her for lack of music.

"I will play, if the ladies permit," said Brandon, and he took Lady Jane's lute and played and sang some very pretty little love songs and some comic ones, too, in a style not often heard in England, so far away from the home of the troubadour and lute. He was full of surprises, this splendid fellow, with his accomplishments and graces.

When we had danced as long as we wished—that is, as Jane wished; as for myself, I would have been dancing yet—Mary again asked us to be seated. Jane having rested, Brandon offered to teach her the new dance, saying he could whistle an air well enough to give her the step. I at once grew uneasy with jealous suspense, for I did not wish Brandon to dance in that fashion with Jane, but to my great relief she replied:

"No, thank you; not tonight." Then, shyly glancing toward me: "Perhaps Sir Edwin will teach me when he learns. It is his business, you know."

Would I? If a month, night and day, would conquer it, the new dance was as good as done for already. That was the first real mark of favor I ever had from Jane.

We now had some songs from Mary and Jane; then I gave one, and Brandon sang again at Mary's request. We had duets and quartets and solos, and the songs were all sweet, for they came from the heart of youth and went to the soul of youth, rich in its God given fresh delight in everything. Then we talked, and Mary and Jane, too, with a sly, shy, soft little word now and then, drew Brandon out to tell of his travels and adventures. He was a pleasing talker and had a smooth, easy flow of words, speaking always in a low, clear voice and with perfect composure. He had a way of looking first one auditor and then another straight in the eyes with a magnetic effect that gave to everything he said an added interest. Although at that time less than twenty-five years old, he was really a learned man, having studied at Barcelona, Salamanca and Paris. While there had been no system in his education, his mind was a sort of knowledge junkshop wherein he could find almost anything he wanted. He spoke German, French and Spanish and seemed to know the literature of all these languages.

He told us he had left home at the early age of sixteen as his uncle's esquire and had fought in France, then down in Holland with the Dutch, had been captured by the Spanish and had joined the Spanish army, as it mattered not where he fought so that there was a chance for honorable achievement and a fair ransom now and then. He told us how he had gone to Barcelona and Salamanca, where he had studied, and thence to Granada, among the Moors; of his fighting against the pirates of Barbary, his capture by them, his slavery and adventurous escape and his regret that now drowsy peace kept him mewed up in a palace.

"It is true," he said, "there is a prospect of trouble with Scotland, but I would rather fight a pack of bowling, starving wolves than the Scotch. They fight like very devils, which, of course, is well, but you have nothing after you have beaten them, not even a good whole wolfskin."

In an unfortunate moment Mary said, "Oh, Master Brandon, tell us of your duel with Judson."

Thoughtful, considerate Jane frowned at the princess in surprise and put her finger on her lips.

"Your ladyship, I fear I cannot," he answered, and left his seat, going over to the window, where he stood, with his back toward us, looking out into the darkness. Mary saw what she had done, and her eyes grew moist, for, with all her faults, she had a warm, tender heart and a quick, responsive sympathy. After a few seconds of painful silence she went softly over to the window where Brandon stood.

"Sir, forgive me," she said, putting her hand prettily upon his arm. "I should have known. Believe me, I would not have hurt you intentionally."

"Ah, my lady, the word was thought-

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lessly spoken and needs no forgiveness. But your heart shows itself in the asking, and I thank you. I wanted but a moment to throw off the thought of that terrible day." Then they came back together, and the princess, who had tact enough when she cared to use it, soon put matters right again.

I started to tell one of my best stories in order to cheer Brandon, but in the midst of it Mary, who, I had noticed, was restless and uneasy, full of blushes and hesitancy and with a manner as new to her as the dawn of the first day was to the awakening world, abruptly asked Brandon to dance with her again. She had risen and was standing by her chair, ready to be led out.

"Gladly," answered Brandon as he sprang to her side and took her hand. "Which shall it be—La Galliard or the new dance?" And Mary, standing there, the picture of waiting, willing modesty, lifted her free hand to his shoulder, tried to raise her eyes to his, but failed and softly said, "The new dance."

This time the dancing was more soberly done, and when Mary stopped it was with serious, thoughtful eyes, for she had felt the tingling of a new, strange force in Brandon's touch. A man, not a worm, but a real man, with all the irresistible, infinite attractions that a man may have for a woman—the subtle drawing of the lodestone for the passive iron—had come into her life. Doubly sweet it was to her intense young virgin soul in that it first revealed the dawning of that two edged bliss which makes a heaven or a hell of earth—of earth, which owes its very existence to love.

I do not mean that Mary was in love, but that she had met and for the first time felt the touch, yes, even the subtle, unconscious, dominating force so sweet to woman, of the man she could love, and had known the rarest throbs that pulsate in that choicest of all God's perfect handiwork—a woman's heart—the throbs that go before, the John the Baptist, as it were, of coming love.

It being after midnight, Mary filled two cups of wine, from each of which she took a sip, and handed them to Brandon and me. She then paid me the 10 crowns, very soberly thanked us and said we were at liberty to go.

The only words Brandon ever spoke concerning that evening were just as we retired:

"Jesu, she is perfect! But you were wrong, Caskoden. I can still thank God I am not in love with her. I would fall upon my sword if I were."

I was upon the point of telling him she had never treated any other man as she had treated him, but I thought best to leave it unsaid. Trouble was apt to come of its own accord soon enough.

In truth, I may as well tell you that when the princess asked me to bring Brandon to her that she might have a little sport at his expense she looked for a laugh, but found a sigh.

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