

The Castle Comedy

By THOMPSON BUCHANAN

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CHAPTER I.

CASUALLY the young man raised his eyes from his harp to find that he had an audience.

He sprang to his feet, looking all embarrassment at the two girls standing suddenly so close at hand.

Pictures of twin beauty, contrasts they were, framed in the door-free stone archway of the half ruined hut.

One was tall, perhaps, and slender perhaps, with the hair of the Italian master—the hair that the red sur kisses, and then, unable to leave for the glory his kiss had awakened, hides in.

Her mouth was made for kissing, for smiling or for the sly saying of things that cut, and her hazel eyes would smile always unless a sad tale dived them.

But the other—there could be no "perhaps" here. He looked and gasped, for in those deep eyes he seemed to find, all intermingled, the witchery, the appeal and the compelling power of midnight. Here was one who could jump the octave of emotions from laughter to rage and strike not a mood between. Her hair was black, and dimly, he was aware of her nose tinging faintly upward, a bit supercilious above the lips that met so straight and yet so tender, while under the white skin he could see the blood run quick this way and that at the dominating black eyes' command. And they answered every thought.

Thus she stood, an imperious little empress of hearts, who needed no herald to announce her rank, for a new subject bowed down before her.

"Come, come, Sir Poet. There are two of us. Which were you honoring?" She of the red gold hair it was mocked him.

He bowed and answered her gently, but his looks sought the other, the smaller girl, who held him.

"Ah, mademoiselle, a poor dancing master can serve but the most beautiful."

"A dancing master?" Her tone was different now. "Why, we thought to have found a love sick poet swain when we heard you playing in our pet hut. Didn't we, May?"

"Why, Eff, a dancing master will be far more use to us awkward country maids. We'll learn to courtesy right and perhaps the minuet if—"

Her black eyes took him in with one swift glance.

"Master Dubarre," he stammered, "Master Dubarre will teach us," she smiled.

"The honor would overwhelm a poor Frenchman." This with another and a deeper bow.

"French?" cried the poet seer. "Why, you speak English like an Englishman!"

"Ah, mademoiselle, I was reared in England, but"—the French shrug spoke volumes—"who would employ an English dancing master?"

The laughter of the three, intermingled, swept away all stiffness.

"Come, May," laughed the Titan haired one, "have you not a French cousin?"

"And by that token should be almost as good a frog eater as this man, I suppose," cried May. "But you must not speak of him."

"Think, Eff, he is fighting Englishmen when he is half English himself."



Casually the young man raised his eyes to find that he had an audience.

His mother was my cousin Sarah, daughter of Cousin John Percy. It was by her running away with the young Viscount de St. Croix when he was secretary of the French legation that the castle came to our, the younger, branch of the family. It killed Cousin John."

"I thought the castle," interrupted Dubarre. "At the inn they told me one Sir Henry Percy had a most beautiful daughter, and she a friend who might show me how English girls can dance."

"I am Mistress May Percy, and this my friend, Mistress Ethel Courtleigh," spoke she of the black eyes, drawing up her figure in slender queenliness to its full sixty inches.

The Frenchman's third bow since his first surprise was the deepest of all. "That was a most unusual luncheon, mademoiselle. He did not lie."

The girl flushed angry at the broad compliment.

"When can you begin your duties, Master Dubarre?" she said stilly.

"At once if only I could move my comrade to the castle."

"Comrade?"

"Yes, mademoiselle." He turned pointing over to one corner, and for the first time the girls saw another man, a big fellow, lying on a bed of moss apparently asleep. "Poor Pierre! He plays the harp for me while I teach the steps. This morning coming down to a little ford he stumbled. The heavy harp on his back hurled him down so much the harder. His head struck a stone. See?"

The dancing master stepped across to the moss bed, and Mistress Percy followed him.

"Oh, it is horrible! Will he live?" the girl exclaimed when she saw the long gash running across the man's forehead at the roots of his hair.

Dubarre shrugged his shoulders again. "It is nothing. We French know much. I bound up the wound. Then we came on to this hut. Pierre was tired from the blood letting. I from carrying the harp. We stopped, and I sung him to sleep."

"But he must be carried to the house. He'll be too weak to walk. Here, Eff!"

"Mistress Percy turned impulsively to her friend—"ride you to the castle. Sir John Wilmerding and Captain Thorncliffe will be there awaiting us. Tell Sir John I say to bring a litter for this wounded man. I will wait here and tend him if he wakes. Men know nothing about such things."

The Frenchman regarded her for a few moments in silence. "You are very good, mademoiselle," he said at last.

Ethel Courtleigh was on her horse riding along the road across the view to her destination a mile away. And as she rode she smiled to herself to think how Sir John Wilmerding, the handsomest, the proudest man in the county, would receive that command to bring out a litter and help carry in an unnamed, unknown, low born assistant to a wandering, renegade French dancing master. But Sir John Wilmerding would obey. Mistress Courtleigh knew that, for it was not recorded when any one—and Sir John last of all—had ever thought of disobeying the imperious little toast of the county.

None in that part of England was more powerful than the Percys. Sir Henry of "the castle" was the family head, and his daughter, Mistress May, had ruled too long a queen not to command absolute obedience. And so the smiling messenger delivered her command and two men, inwardly cursing, hurried about to obey the latest whimsical wish of their sovereign.

Out in the hut Pierre was slowly reviving. The girl had Dubarre bring her water in his hat from the brook that rushed noisily before the door, and, using her own handkerchief, she washed daintily and bound up the ugly wound with tender care. The big Frenchman lying there watched her face throughout with mute, dog-eyed affection.

Then May learned how old Armand Dubarre, in the generation before, had taught the ladies of France to dance, how he had been indifferent in carrying letters for a certain noble margrave. Dubarre shook his head when he spoke of this.

"The elopement failed. The margrave was killed. The lady's family was very powerful, and my father fled to England." He went on to tell how the outlawed Frenchman had started a dancing class. He taught the young ladies in noble English families, and so had married an English waiting maid. Gaston Dubarre was their son.

The girl seemed to lose interest after she had found all this. She listened, though, when the Frenchman went on volubly to explain that he had followed his father's trade and had taken up where the elder Dubarre left off.

Thoroughly disgusted, Mistress Percy turned back into the hut. She turned just in time to intercept a look that flashed from Dubarre to Pierre and back again. The girl caught her breath and walked straight up to the man standing beside the harp.

"M. Dubarre, was that **O**ing winded tale the truth?"

He faced her, laughing easily and with the inevitable shrug.

"Mistress Percy can believe all or none, just as she pleases," he said.

Then the girl looked at Pierre. The wounded man lay still, with eyes closed, face stern and set lips that made no sign.

"That evening Mistress Percy told her father, her father, Sir John Wilmerding, Captain Thorncliffe and the rest of the company the story she had heard from Master Dubarre, and the next morning the dancing master gave his first lesson.

CHAPTER II.

"COME, come, mademoiselle, that is all wrong."

The dancing master spoke sharply, as one would to an unruly child, for Mistress Percy was in one of her obstinate moods, and the lesson had gone awry from the beginning. They were at one end of the long, narrow, bare fencing hall, which since the arrival of Dubarre had become, too, a dancing room.

Now the girl drew herself up to make the most of her inches.

"M. Dubarre, I am not accustomed!"—she began.

"To hear the truth," he ended for her, smiling lightly; then, with grave politeness: "Certainly, if mademoiselle wishes to achieve awkwardness, I will say already she is far on the road to perfection. Pardon me for hitherto mistaking the aim of mademoiselle."

His face showed deep concern at his mistake. Only about the eyes was the quizzical humor of a man amusing himself at the expense of a spoiled child.

Her eyes flashed danger signals; but, altogether unmindful, he turned to his assistant.

"Pierre, put your fingers out to tune, that the music may keep step with mademoiselle."

At the command, as an automaton might, Pierre, seated before his big harp at the other end of the hall, juggled the strings out of all time or tune.

"Do you not like it?" Dubarre asked when the girl involuntarily put her hands to her ears. "If after three months you will not keep time with the music, then the music must keep time with you. My reputation as a dancing master demands that you keep together."

There was joy now in his tone as at the solution of a great difficulty.

"Possibly were the teacher better progress had not been so slow," Mistress Percy blurted angrily.

The Frenchman bowed profound acquiescence. "Mademoiselle is right," he said, now sadly. "I should never have attempted the task. My father, a famous dancer, often told me that only an old man could muster patience to teach the very young, who have no idea how to learn."

The girl whirled on him, splendidly angry.

"Am I to be insulted by my dancing teacher? Monsieur, I would have you know this shall be the last lesson."

"Then it were wise to make the most of it," he answered coolly and took her hand. "Pierre, play slowly. We will dance the minuet."

From pure wonder at his presumption, she yielded. For a time back and forward in graceful measure they trod through the stately dance. Ethel Courtleigh, waiting her turn, thought she had never seen so well matched a couple.

The dancing master stopped short and shrugged his shoulders impatiently. "One, two, three, four. Can you not possibly keep time?" he asked.

"Now, Pierre, again."

Once more they trod the measure. A second time Dubarre stopped short.

"Is mademoiselle a clumsy milkmaid dodging cows' tails? Have you no knees?" he asked with exaggerated politeness, then added mournfully, "Oh, that courtesy!"

And then the storm broke forth in earnest. Mistress Percy jerked her hand from his.

"When came it," she cried, "that a paid teacher so addressed his pupil, and that pupil a lady? Am I a child to be ordered about by a runaway Frenchman, a trickster with his feet? No; I will not dance. I am utterly weary of it, and I will never, never dance again!" And with her head very high and her body held very stiffly erect the girl turned her back on him and walked proudly to the side window to see how utterly miserable everything looked without.

The man merely shrugged his shoulders and glanced at the clock.

"Certainly mademoiselle has taken more than her fair share of the time, but, then, Mistress Courtleigh learns so quickly that it will make little difference."

His tone was easy and absolutely cool. With a sigh as though to himself he added, "Mon Dieu, it is exhausting to teach a young lady with a quick temper, who will not try to learn."

Mistress Percy whirled about to speak, then as quickly turned back to the window. Looking closely at Dubarre, Ethel Courtleigh thought she saw about his mouth the faint shadow of a smile that was quickly pressed away. Then he came over to her.

"Will Mistress Courtleigh so honor a poor dancing master by affording him a little real pleasure?"

The tone was supplication, the bow a courtier's. Ethel Courtleigh arose promptly.

"Pierre, we will dance that minuet." Again the girl at the window started. She would not look, but she could hear everything. Now Dubarre was speaking. Above the music of the harp the words came to her.

"One, two, three, four—a gracious courtesy! A little more now. That is it. Ah, Mistress Courtleigh, it is, indeed, a pleasure to dance with one so graceful, so eager to dance well. Play that again, Pierre. I would see if Mistress Courtleigh can reach perfection twice." A pause of a few moments, and he cried, with enthusiasm, "Indeed, indeed, you could not, for the last was even better than the first."

"With such a teacher, M. Dubarre, it were, indeed, hard not to dance well." And Ethel Courtleigh smiled her gratification, while May Percy drummed violently on the window pane.

Once more the music started and again, after some time, Dubarre began to speak.

The girl at the window at last turned

ed to see M. Dubarre leading his pleased pupil to her seat. He bent low over the little hand.

"May I thank you for a very great pleasure?" he said earnestly. "It was worth the trip from France."

And Mistress Percy turned back to dismal counting of the trees outside. Pierre stopped playing and began to put the cover on his harp. Gaston Dubarre was preparing to go. Suddenly the girl at the window moved away from it. She hesitated for a moment; then, with her old time impulsiveness, walked straight down the room to where the man who had chided and laughed at her stood.

"Monsieur"—she stopped, strange, embarrassed—"if—if you please, I will dance that minuet."

She stood before him, her cheeks pink, her eyes wonderfully soft and moist, with the sweet humiliation of her first defeat. Not even his eyelashes flickered, but the man bowed very low.

"Her dancing master is always at mademoiselle's service," he said. "Pierre, the minuet."

Fifteen minutes later Captain Thorncliffe and Sir John Wilmerding came in for their daily bout with the foils, just in time to hear Mistress Percy ask:

"And do you think I will improve?"

Dubarre smiled. "Already mademoiselle shows marked improvement," he answered.

"Thank you, monsieur." And the newcomers wondered at her tone.

Pierre put the cover on his harp and went away, the girls left, and Sir John, big, strong and hotheaded, assumed his mask and bluff against Captain Thorncliffe, the bluff and hearty soldier who had won promotion and gazette mention off and over for his ability in fighting.

"Yawning the dancing master went to the window."

"You are strong, Dubarre, I know. Why don't you fence or shoot or ride?" asked Captain Thorncliffe as he was getting ready.

The one addressed laughed. "Those accomplishments are scarce within the province of a dancing master, monsieur, but I have tried all three."

"Come, are you really, Hal?" asked Sir John impatiently, and they crossed swords, while Dubarre turned back to his window. Soon the noise forced him to look around.

Assuredly the bout was becoming hotter every minute. The narrow place of arms resounded to the trampling of feet, while over all the two blades sang their rasping, clashing song of the steel. Up and down the room the contest waged, now Captain Harry Thorncliffe and now Sir John Wilmerding holding the advantage. They fenced with the eager animosity of tried friends opposed in mimic combat.

"Touched!" Captain Thorncliffe cried it and, stepping back, raised his fist, smiling.

"No, Hal, I protest. You touched me not. Your point failed to reach by quite an inch. I twisted away as I saw it coming."

Sir John was almost angry in his disclaimer. Captain Thorncliffe still showed his good humored smile.

"Come, come, Jack. Be generous. You have beaten so many that you can easily afford me one little point. Besides, I know I touched you. I felt it plainly. 'Twas the old French Percy trick that involved me from Spain. We'll let M. Dubarre decide as referee."

Sir John sneered. "What can a dancing master know of fencing? Let him stick to his jigs, where he is at home. Zounds! You choose a queer umpire between gentlemen, Hal!"

Dubarre, who had been watching the fight with indifferent attention, reddened ever so slightly. He walked over and, with the utmost respect, offered Sir John his handkerchief.

"Would monsieur have me wipe off the chalk from his plastron?" he said and deftly pointed out a faint white dot on the red heart of the plastron.

It was Sir John's time to redder. Captain Thorncliffe's chance to score.

"Pardon, gentlemen," said the dancing master, "I cannot umpire longer, for Mistress Percy desired me to bring her Sir John Suckling's verses from the library."

CHAPTER III.

"EVERY girl should desire to marry."

Sir Henry Percy puffed out his stomach and pursed up his lips to emphasize this distinctly orthodox sentiment. He was a large, heavy man, who thought that God made the Percys and then the world to fit them.

"But I don't intend to marry."

Mistress Percy stamped her little foot, and that made Sir Henry's emphasis seem tame.

"At least, dad," with an upward dash of her eyes, "at least not yet."

"Ah!" Sir Henry breathed once more, while Sir John Wilmerding, standing near, became again his normal red.

For this was the serious time when the years fostered plans of two old men and the day dreams of one young one were to be put to the test of a girl's caprice. From earliest childhood she had known that in the far ahead, lazy, indefinite some time there would come a fateful five minutes when she must decide. In those days when old Sir Elmer Wilmerding and Sir Henry Percy often sat together talking of their lifetime friendship and the shared joys of the long ago, the two children playing in the hall knew that sooner or later in the talk one of the fathers would look at them. Then invariably both men rose, and standing, the old cronies would drink a health to the children, May and John, whose future union was to cement the life long comradeship of their fathers. That either of the children might object never entered the heads of the

two squares. They were friends; their children were to marry; that was all there was to it.

Now was come that time when, under the agreement of the long ago, the children were to be brought together. Sir John Wilmerding knew the old agreement by heart—how three days before her seventeenth birthday they must be betrothed. The marriage might be delayed two years, but no longer.

It was a merely formal matter of a few minutes, Sir Henry Percy thought as he called the young man and girl to the library that morning. The betrothal was in a hurry to get away for his ride, but decided reluctantly that he ought to spare a few minutes for telling his daughter she might begin preparing for her marriage.

His very first sentence had raised the storm. Mistress Percy now paced



"But I don't intend to marry."

up and down the library in most ungracious-like excitement. To be brought face to face with marriage when for weeks she had been planning nothing more serious than a birthday party was enough to disconcert any about-to-be-seventeen-year-old miss.

"Why did you not tell me of this, dad?" she demanded, stopping short and regarding the two men standing helpless before her.

"My child, the agreement—you knew it," he protested weakly.

"Agreement! How could you and Sir Elmer agree whom I should marry?"

"But, May," Sir Henry answered, more firmly now as the Percy stubbornness aroused itself, "Sir Elmer desired it; I desired and do desire it. Remember your duty to your father, child. John Wilmerding, now—"

"But you can't want me to marry a man I don't love, father?" The word "father" in place of the old, familiar, loving "dad" should have warned him, but it did not.

"Love! Puff! Fiddlesticks!" The square fairly roared. "What's love got to do with housewifery, the ordering of servants and the raising of a family? You do these things, and I'll warrant me John Wilmerding will do the loving for the pair of you."

Then the old man discovered there were two Percys in that room. The girl drew herself up, cold and white. Only her eyes were blazing.

"John Wilmerding may gamble or fight his way into another's love, father, but I don't intend to marry him."

Her tone was calm, even, rigorously indifferent. It might have been, "I don't care for a glass of water, thank you."

Sir John Wilmerding went white to the lips; Sir Henry Percy red to his ear tips.

"You d-d-don't," he stammered. "Why, why, you baggage, you shall marry him. Do you think I am going to be put out by a child of a sixteen-year-old girl, my own child at that? Not marry Wilmerding? Why not? Now you shall marry him if he were the worst rake in the county. If he had fought a dozen duels over a dozen women instead of one. Do you want a milkpout for a husband? If you do, I want no wife faced preaching parson for a son-in-law. I tell you, he's only a lad of spirit." And, turning, Sir Henry patted the white faced young man on the shoulder affectionately. "Did you ever see a finer boy?" he said and whirled back to face his daughter.

Then his jaw dropped very suddenly. May Percy had gone over to the table, seated herself and was busily turning the leaves of a book as though searching for something.

"What are you doing now?" asked Sir Henry in very different tones.

"I was trying," she said courteously, "to find that piece Mr. Butler wrote, in which he says:

"Atone for sins they are inclined to by damning those they have no mind to."

"I thought probably you and Sir John might like to read it. It damns the wife faced hypocrites in great style."

Sir Henry's face became mottled purple now.

(Continued Next Saturday.)

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Registration of Land Title.

In the Circuit Court of the State of Oregon for Lane County.

In the matter of the application of Louis E. Bean to register the title to the land in said application described, to-wit: The east one-half of section fifteen in township seventeen, south of range eight west of the Willamette Meridian, containing 320 acres in Lane county, Oregon,

against H. D. Offutt and Lola A. Offutt, his wife, Mary M. Bremer and August F. Bremer, her husband, and James O'Fatt, defendants.

To all whom it may concern: Take notice that on the 13th day of March, A. D. 1907, an application was filed by said Louis E. Bean, in the Circuit Court of Lane County, for initial registration of the title to the land above described. Now unless you appear on or before the 16th day of April, A. D. 1907, and show cause why such application shall not be granted, the same will be taken as confessed and a decree will be entered according to the prayer of the application, and you will be forever barred from disputing the same.

(Seal.) E. U. LEE, Clerk.

WILLIAMS & BEAN, Applicants' Attorneys.

Notice for Publication. United States Land Office, Roseburg, Or., March 8, 1907.

Notice is hereby given that in compliance with the provisions of the act of congress of June 3, 1878, entitled an act for the sale of timber lands in the states of California, Oregon, Nevada and Washington territory, as extended to all the public land states by act of August 4, 1892, Eugene Holland, of Crow, county of Lane, state of Oregon, has this day filed in this office his sworn statement No. 7871 for the purchase of the 8 1/2 of NE 1/4 and S 1/2 of NW 1/4 of section No. 8, in township No. 19 south, range No. 8 west, W. M., and will offer proof to show that the land sought is more valuable for its timber or stone than for agricultural purposes, and to establish his claim to said land before W. W. Calkins, U. S. commissioner, at his office in Eugene, Oregon, on Thursday, the 6th day of June, 1907.

He names as witnesses: Henry Hinkson, of Alma, Oregon; Sidney Porter, of Walton, Oregon; Harvey Saltee, of Alma, Oregon, and Clair Hinkson, of Alma, Oregon. Any and all persons claiming adversely the above described lands are requested to file their claims in this office on or before said 6th day of June, 1907.

BENJAMIN L. EDDY, Register.

Notice for Publication. United States Land Office, Roseburg, Or., Feb. 5, 1907.

Notice is hereby given that in compliance with the provisions of the act of congress of June 3, 1878, entitled an act for the sale of timber lands in the states of California, Oregon, Nevada and Washington Territory, as extended to all public land states by act of August 4, 1892, Valeria Westfall, of Greenleaf, county of Lane, state of Oregon, has this day filed in this office her sworn statement No. 7766 for the purchase of the S 1/2, SE 1/4 of Section No. 14 in Township No. 17 south, Range 8 west, W. M., and will offer proof to show that the land sought is more valuable for its timber or stone than for agricultural purposes, and to establish her claim to said land before W. W. Calkins, U. S. Commissioner, at his office in Eugene, Oregon, on Tuesday, the 9th day of July, 1907.

She names as witnesses: Chipper Wilcut, of Deadwood, Oregon; Clarence Burnett, of Greenleaf, Oregon; Oaro Wilcut, of Greenleaf, Oregon; Ira Brown, of Gosson, Oregon.

Any and all persons claiming adversely the above-described lands are requested to file their claims in this office on or before said 9th day of July, 1907.

BENJAMIN L. EDDY, Register.

Notice for Publication. United States Land Office, Roseburg, Or., March 27, 1907.

Notice is hereby given that in compliance with the provisions of the act of congress of June 3, 1878, entitled "An act for the sale of timber lands in the states of California, Oregon, Nevada and Washington Territory," as extended to all public land states by act of August 4, 1892, Guard Huston, of Madison, county of Lane, state of Oregon, has this day filed in this office his sworn statement No. 7940 for the purchase of the SW 1/4 of NW 1/4 and lots 3 and 4 of section No. 4, in township No. 18 south, range No. 6 west, W. M., and will offer proof to show that the land sought is more valuable for its timber or stone than for agricultural purposes, and to establish his claim to said land before the register and receiver at this office in Roseburg, Oregon, on Saturday, the 22d day of June, 1907.

He names as witnesses Benjamin J. Owen, of Iverson, Oregon; Ross Huston, of Elmira, Oregon; Frank E. Makenson, of Elmira, Oregon; Bert W. Inman, of Elmira, Oregon.

Any and all persons claiming adversely the above-described lands are requested to file their claims in this office on or before said 22d day of June, 1907.

BENJAMIN L. EDDY, Register.

Notice for Publication. United States Land Office, Roseburg, Or., March 27, 1907.

Notice is hereby given that in compliance with the provisions of the act of congress of June 3, 1878, entitled "An act for the sale of timber lands in the states of California, Oregon, Nevada and Washington Territory," as extended to all public land states by act of August 4, 1892, Guard Huston, of Madison, county of Lane, state of Oregon, has this day filed in this office his sworn statement No. 7940 for the purchase of the SW 1/4 of NW 1/4 and lots 3 and 4 of section No. 4, in township No. 18 south, range No. 6 west, W. M., and will offer proof to show that the land sought is more valuable for its timber or stone than for agricultural purposes, and to establish his claim to said land before the register and receiver at this office in Roseburg, Oregon, on Saturday, the 22d day of June, 1907.

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Any and all persons claiming adversely the above-described lands are requested to file their claims in this office on or before said 22d day of June, 1907.

BENJAMIN L. EDDY, Register.