

DEEDS *of*
DARING DONE
BY GIRLS

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“SEE, CLEMENCE, A GOOD OMEN. LOOK AT THE NEW MOON.”

AN OPEN LETTER

Do not think, dear girls, that because you are girls you may not have as much courage as your brothers. I believe that quite as stout hearts beat beneath muslin frocks as under stuff jackets. When you have finished reading this book about your sisters, perhaps—if you do not already—you will agree with me, and think that it needs only occasion to call out the necessary courage. I have been asked which one of these heroines I think the most daring, but—oh dear—it would never do to have a favourite, would it? So I leave them to you, and that you will enjoy learning of their trials and triumphs is the wish of your friend,

THE AUTHOR.

**DEEDS OF DARING
DONE BY GIRLS**



THE ROBE OF THE DUCHESS
As told by Jehan, her Page in the Year
of Grace 1392

I

Tis not so," quoth she, "and you know it"; and with that she fetched me a buffet on the ear.

Now, when the other pages saw me bested like that by a damsel, even though she were my Lady, they roared and girded at me so loud that I liked to have choked with rage.

I ran forward a step; but she cried out,—

"An you touch me I'll have you whipped, sir"; and, truth, she would, which well I knew, for I'd felt ere this old Raoul's whip curling about my shoulders, all on her charges too. But that was some years since. 'Twas this wise that the present pother came about.

Of a joyous afternoon in May, my Lady Eleonore took it into her head to go into the court to see her hawk. For these many months I'd been training of it for her, and in all the mews there was not another flew so true, aimed so swift, and brought back her quarry so little torn.

My Lady knew right well that the hawk was for her, but she knew not that I thought to give it her on her fête day, which fell on the morrow. The bird was in fine feather, not a pinion ruffed, her russet colour showing redly in the sun,—it was a Barberry bird,—and a new hood of fine leather on her head.

On her feet, fastened by bewits of deer's hide, hung two Milan bells of gold,—the one, as is ever the way with choicest bells, a semi-tone below the other. These bells I had begged from Comte Gaston, who gave willingly enough when he knew that they were to pleasure my Lady.

Now 'twas not my purpose that she should see the bird till next day, but womenfolk ever contrive to mix matters up. I thought but to stay her, to keep her jesting for a while; but her anger rose and was greater than I knew.

She was down in the broad hall on her way to the mews, and I following behind, before my wits, which work ever a thought slow, had conjured up something to say.

“Pray, mistress,” saith I, “how old be you to-morrow? Let me think, will it be all of eleven years?”

To tell truth, I knew her years as well as she. It was nine years since my Lady's mother, Dame Eleonore of Comminges, had brought and left her daughter with my Lord, Gaston Phoebus, Comte de Foix.

Comte Gaston was my Lady's cousin, and poor Dame Eleonore, her mother, fleeing from a cruel husband, knew not where to place the child, so sought advice from Comte Gaston, a powerful and great lord.

“Leave her with me,” saith my Lord, who had taken a fancy to my little Lady, then but a child of three. She was the first bright thing that had come to the old castle of Orthez, which was but a gloomy tower since in a rage my Lord Gaston had slain his only son, and driven forth to her own people his wife, the Princess Agnes.

Canst thou wonder that we all loved the child?

None knew nor loved her better than I, being that my Lord Gaston gave me to be her page and playfellow, since there were but scullery maids and some rude wenches in the castle since the Princess Agnes went forth. So who should doubt but that I should know my Lady's age? Besides this I was but four years older come Hallowe'en.

Being well grown and tall, she was ever tender on the subject of her years. By my Lord's command, she had been taught to play on the lute, she could walk a measure, hunt and hawk, and since the new tirewoman had come, there had been much bravery of apparel. So 'twas but to tease her and keep her from the mews that I put forth,—

“All of eleven years?”

“'Tis not so, and you know it,” quoth she, and then came the buffet.

I choked down my rage, and turning to those that mocked me, thought to bring the laugh on her.

“Varlets,” cried I, “my Lady Eleonore is no longer a child, she chooses you to know. Twelve years old will she be to-morrow, but two years younger than our new Queen Isabeau. And who knows what brave suitor comes to woo?”

At this they all laughed again, as in truth I hoped they would. With a black look at me and a stamp of her foot, my Lady turns and goes up the stair. This pleased me well, since the hawk was forgotten.

“Wit ye well, ye shall suffer for this,” sneered one of the pages, between whom and me there was ever discord. “Your mistress wilt have you soundly swung, and well I pray my Lord will do it himself.”

My skin was pricking somewhat at the thought, but it behoved me to show no signs of it; so I looked him in the eye and flung back,—

“If my Lord so much as cuffs me, thou mayst do it also”; and with that I strolled to the mews.

I stroked the hawk, and thought how pleased my Lady would be on the morrow to have her and fly her too, since, to pleasure my Lady, my Lord had passed his word that we all should fly a cast with him on the broad marches that lay to the west a league or more.

Long ere cockcrow the next day was I astir. ’Twas a bright day for me, since my Lord had given me a new livery. For the first time I cast away my leathern doublet and put on one of soft cloth, and drew on a brave pair of chausses, a red one on the right leg and a green one on the left, and tied the points to my doublet.

It needed but only a sword to make me a man!

As I stole down the stair, I crept into the great hall to take one look into the great mirror of purest crystal which had but lately come to my Lord from a land far over seas, called Venice.

What I saw therein causeth me to turn hot, since never thought I to look so fine. Clapping my cap on my head, I ran

to the mews, to bathe the feet of the hawk in fair water, to settle her bells and jesses, and to see that the hood could be quickly cast aside. Soon I heard the bustle in the courtyard, and hurried thither with the hawk on hand.

My faith, but it was a joyous sight!

There on the highest step stood my Lord and beside him my mistress Eleonore. My Lord was smiling at her, and well he might, she stood beside him so straight and tall. She was in a gown of green, made of Florence cloth, and on her head was a cap bound with many chains of gold, which, she telleth me later, came from the same far-away country as the mirror,— Venice. In their midst was set a stone big as a throstle's egg and blue as the sky. On her hips hung a girdle of gold set close with little stones of this same sky-blue.

All this I saw as I walked from the court's end. Coming up the steps, said I in my bravest fashion,—

“Mistress Eleonore, here is the hawk I trained for thee; and I set the Barberry bird upon her wrist.

“Now, Jehan, I forgive thee,” saith she, “and trust thou'lt bear in mind that I be twelve years, not eleven. My Lord and cousin hath a gift for thee also, and telleth me to give it thee now.”

With that she hands me out a sword,—a brave, bright sword!

And my Lord says kindly,—

“Have it ever ready in her service, Jehan; she is a lonely maid.”

I bent and kissed my Lady's hand, and saith with my heart in my mouth,

“My Lord, I'll e'en follow her to the world's end.”

“Thou art a good lad, and I trust thee”; and as he spoke, my Lord smiled.

True, as I swore fealty to my Lady, I little recked how soon 't would be before I rode away behind her!

Just then the huntsman wound his horn, and we all rode out over the drawbridge and away into the bright sun and green fields a-hawking. We made a merry day of it. The hounds sped before, starting up many a creature that fled affrighted from us.

My Lady rode, not her own palfrey, which was a gentle animal but of little speed, but a chestnut mare, one specially cherished by Comte Gaston, even though she was a thought too light for his bulk.

For many a day the mare had been but exercised about the court, and being a high-mettled creature, soon grew fretted by the flapping of my Lady's habit,—a thing to which she was ill-used.

We were pricking along at a good pace, my Lady having her hands full with holding down the mare, when suddenly from the grass at her very feet darted out a fallow deer, a little thing scarcely more than a month old. The mare started, threw up her head, and ere I knew what had befallen, had wheeled about and started off like the wind.

“Jehan,” I heard my Lady call; and turning my own horse about, I spurred him after the flying mare. On we sped; the others, passing through a copse, had missed seeing our plight.

“Hold fast, mistress,” shouted I, while I strove with whip and spur to get beside her.

Little by little we crept forward, my horse and I, and after that day I ever forbore to call him a poor thing. First his nose pressed the mare’s thigh, and then he came up with the saddle-cloth, and then a bit ahead of that, till I called,—

“Loose your foot from the stirrup, mistress.”

Even as I spoke I could see that she did it.

“Lean towards me and drop the reins, mistress”; and as I spoke I switched my poor nag and leaned from the saddle, took my mistress about the waist, and pulled her clear of the mare. It took but a moment more to set her gently on the ground and start after the mare, since I knew, if aught befell her, our day of pleasuring would have but an ill ending. Freed from the flapping of the skirt, she gradually slackened her pace, and ere long I was leading her back to where my Lady stood with the tall marsh grasses waving about her feet.

“Help me to mount, Jehan,” saith she, whilst I was turning about in my mind how to urge her to let me ride the mare while she took the steadier horse.

“Pray, mistress,” I began; but she cut me short with,—

“Have a care that my cousin knows not of this mishap, since it fairly shames me to think how the mare bested me. But I was not affrighted.”

At this she gave a side look at me, but I knew her too well to show that I had noted her white face. I did not answer, but pondered if it was not seemlier to guard my mistress even against herself. When she noted me standing and switching of the grass, she crieth out,—

“Sure, Jehan, it would be an unkind part to tell that I was like to be run with on my fête day, since all has come out well. Promise now that thou wilt hold thy peace.”

So promise I did, and none guessed how near we had come to grief, though my Lord, when we drew up with them, wondered why the mare looked so hard ridden!

’Twas now well on to noon, and we rested by the side of a clear stream, and ate of squirrels fresh roasted, and of little fishes drawn from the brook but half an hour before, and of the honey of the wild bee spread on cakes of white flour, and of spices and of wine.

“Hast had a happy day, little one?” saith my Lord, as we sat ’neath the trees; and my mistress, turning, laid her cheek on his hand and said,—

“Dear Cousin, never can I thank thee enough for all that thou hast done for me”; and the tears like to have fallen.

“To see thee happy gives me all the thanks I crave”; and my Lord fetched a deep sigh, thinking belike of that son whom his own hand had slain.

Then, when the sun grew low, homeward we turned, the
pages singing as we rode along,—

“White as a lily, more ruddy than the rose,
Brilliant as a ruby that with spark of fire glows,
Your beauty and your loveliness to me all peerless
shows,

White as a lily, more ruddy than the rose.
My heart for your heart watches; it pleaseth me to know
That to all other lovers the law of love I show.

White as a lily, more ruddy than the rose,
Brilliant as a ruby that with spark of fire glows.”

II

When we came in sight of the castle of Orthez, there rose from the great chimneys a dark cloud of smoke. The drawbridge fell, and the steward rode forth to meet us.

“Lo, my Lord,” he cried, “hasten home. Whilst thou wert absent here hath come a great lord, the Due de Berry, with messages from the King.”

“Hath he a great following?” questioned my Lord.

“Seventy lances and thirty sumpter mules. They are cared for, my Lord, and all have supped.”

We hurried forward. As my Lord rode into the court, the Due de Berry cometh through the door to meet him. He was elder than my Lord, and was uncle to King Charles, and a powerful and noble lord. Never had I looked on one so great as he. All France hath heard how he taxed his people and gathered from them great stores of money that he might have gold to buy palaces, that he might get from strange and foreign countries noble pictures with which to deck his walls, and tapestries wrought in coloured threads and gold. Not only these things did he buy, but books enriched with jewels and filled with images of saints and others, coloured with blue, red, and gold. After him rode hundreds of followers when he went to war or travelled abroad in strange countries.

As one looked upon him, his face seemeth harsh at first, yet a smile became it well, and he smiled when he looked on my mistress, as doth everyone who seeth her.

One, two, three days he tarried. 'Twas said that his matters were despatched in one, and true it is that when my mistress was before him, his eyes ne'er left her face.

Right seemly she looketh, thought I, as I stood behind her chair when they supped. Never before had she borne herself so bravely, and rich were the gauds that tirewoman furnished forth. One evening my Lady came into the great hall in a gown of cherry red, made from the thread of the silkworm and wonderous soft and fine. Above this was a long coat with wide pointed sleeves, and it was bound about her with a sash of cloth that shone like silver. Her hair was woven with strings of pearls, large and white, and over her hung a veil like unto a spider's web, set full with shining threads. Well do I remember all this, for it was the first time that ever I had seen such richness of apparel.

Till now we had been friends together, playmates. The priest whom my Lord Gaston had brought to dwell in the castle taught us to read, and when we irked him overmuch sent us packing. Then would we spend the time running over the great old castle, shooting with the bow and arrow, and teaching the shagged greyhounds to fetch and carry.

But from to-day all was different. She was a great lady, and I her page Jehan, to hand her cup, to do her bidding within doors, and to ride at her litter's side or by her saddle when she went abroad, with my sword loosened and hand steady and prompt at her need.

On the fourth day my Lord Gaston rode out with the Due de Berry to see him fare forth. My mistress stood upon the steps as they set out, with her sky-blue jewel in her hair and her

cheeks like maybuds. The Due had bent and kissed her hand, and of a truth I heard him say,—

“Farewell, mistress. Thou wilt hear from me again, and that shortly.”

She saith never a word, but looked into his face and smiled.

Now once again it was “Jehan here” and “Jehan there,” and we fell back into our old ways. I digged and tilled for her the garden patch without the walls of the castle, for this was a year of richness, and my Lady’s gillyflowers and lavender, lilies and coriander, showed bright beside the dull potherbs, anise, mustard, and storax, and the beds of leeks, dittany, lettuces, and garden-cress. We had words over the poppies.

“Jehan,” saith she, “didst ever see the poppies brighter than they be this spring?”

“Fair they be, mistress, and of a size too, so that the seeds will be choice, and none need suffer for lack of a sleeping draught if they be ill!”

“Mean you to save all the flowers for seeds?”

“Of a truth, yes, mistress, since they be so fine.”

“But, Jehan, thou knowest that I love the poppies, and sure they were planted for me.”

Now this was true, but the flowers were so exceeding fine, and gave promise of such a crop of seeds, that I fairly loathed to give one up. So I tried to coax Mistress Eleonore with other buds.

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