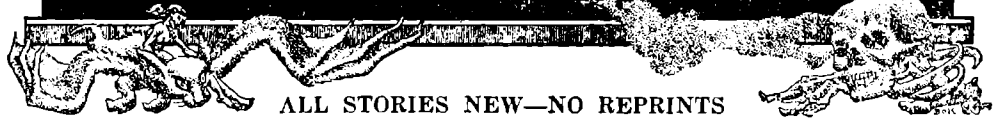


Weird Tales



JANUARY, 1942

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Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.

Published bi-monthly by Weird Tales, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y. Reentered as second-class matter January 26, 1940, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y. under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 15 cents. Subscription rates: One year in the United States and possessions, 90c. Foreign and Canadian postage extra. English Office: Charles Lavell, Limited, 4 Clements Inn, Strand, London, W.C.2, England. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. Copyright, 1941, by Weird Tales. Copyrighted in Great Britain. Title registered in U. S. Patent Office.

PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

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Vol. 36, No. 3

D. McILWRAITH, Editor.

HENRY AVELINE PERKINS, Associate Editor.

The White Lady

By DOROTHY QUICK

The two lovers had concocted a white lie—about a White Lady who walked the narrow hall, and haunted Tall Trees when a Vetrell had been wronged . . . and yet, there was more than a little truth to the whole yarn!

“**M**ARY VETRELL,” he said, his dark, malevolent eyes flashing, “I want your answer.”

The girl looked into his crafty face. It had power, and one glance was enough to know he would stop at nothing to gain his ends. His figure was dark and sinister against the linen fold panelling. He was taller than Mary—a good six feet, which seemed even more due to the long black robes he wore. He was all dark—hair, eyes, under thick black brows which met over his nose. His skin was sallow, and craft had etched deep lines beside his narrow, cruel mouth. He was handsome in an evil way, and, without the churchly robes and tonsure, might have been a fine figure of a man. The only touch of color about him flashed from the jewels in the huge cross he wore suspended from a gold chain about his neck and the ring on his finger, which was a ruby heavily mounted in gold.

Mary Vetrell was afraid of him. Fear flowed through her like angry waters, but she held her head high and let no trace of it show.

If the man was dark Mary was light itself. She was tall and slim with all the grace of a young willow tree. Her eyes, brown with little golden flecks in them, under straight brows with heavy lashes, looked calmly at the man who threatened

her. She had a mobile face, exceedingly lovely. Her hair was a deep bronze—what little could be seen under her coif, which was of the type Holbein painted. She wore a rose-colored gown over an underdress of heavy green satin. The stiff skirts billowed away from her slender waist which was encircled by a gold girdle. The low cut square neck of her dress was outlined in gold thread and the glint of emeralds shone from the embroidery, of which there were also touches on the sleeves.

Her hand picked at the rose-colored velvet nervously as she answered in a calm and steady voice that betrayed none of the havoc her emotions were in.

“My lord Abbot, my answer is plain and short, though I have been long in giving it, who weighed its cost.” She drew herself up to her full height so her eyes were almost on a level with those in the saturnine face opposite hers, and shot the word at him as though it were an arrow from a bow. “No!”

“So—my nephew is not good enough for a Vetrell,” snarled the Abbot. “Listen, girl, in Spain where we Telvas come from, the Telva name is a key that opens all doors at Court, and Clement has not only Telva blood from my sister, but D’Aigula blood from his father. In Spain those two names mean much—not only in Spain, but here—as you will find, lady, unless you

"The Abbott shrieked and ran from the hall, the black skirt of his cassock flapping around his legs like a raven's wing!"



send a better answer to my nephew Clement's suit."

"My Lord Abbot, I never questioned Clement's high lineage, but I can send no

other answer to a man I do not love."

The man threw back his head and laughed.

"Love! Is that all? Love will come after mating—trust my nephew for that."

"I am no Spanish girl who sits cloistered

until she is given to a man of her father's choice. I am Mary Vetrell, daughter of Sir Charles Vetrell of Tall Trees, and we Vetrell women have the right to choose our own husbands. It is so written in the Vetrell deed for Tall Trees and those acres you would join to the Abbey—that deed which William the Conqueror gave to the Charles de Vetrell who helped him win this island, and to his Anne, who saved the King's life and asked this boon as her reward. She loved her father's clerk, and when the King put in the deed that Vetrell women could be wedded as they would, she married her love and was truly happy. As I shall be, Lord Abbot, when I take me a husband of my own choosing." She emphasized "my" so that Telva could not doubt her intention.

"And have you made your choice, daughter?" Once more the Abbot's tones were smooth.

MARY hesitated. What should she do? She *had* made her choice—of that there had been no doubt in her mind since her childhood playmate, John de Winton, had come back from the foreign wars as Sir John de Winton—an honor gained from his bravery in the field. She had loved him as a child, as a long, lanky boy before he sailed for France, and now she loved him as a man. But although she loved him, and he rode from Winton Castle each day to Tall Trees and spent much of his time beside her, he had said no word of love.

The Abbot stirred and Mary, throwing caution to the winds, told the truth—and a lie.

"I have, my father—of a truth I have made my choice, and ere the winter comes John de Winton and I will beg your services to make us one—"

"Though you come on your knees I will refuse."

"There are other priests in England."

"Ay—and other Kings than William the

Conqueror. What one monarch gives another can take away. King Henry has been ever gracious to me, and Queen Katherine is a true daughter of the Church. You would do well to let me choose your husband." His words were soft but there was sharp steel under the velvet.

"I am sorry, but my heart has already chosen. Nor do I think the King would greatly care whether I wed Clement D'Aigula or John de Winton."

She had struck back, but the Abbot merely smiled.

"Queen Katherine would. She likes to see her countrymen advanced. I swear to you I will get the King's ear, and chop your Tall Trees down if need be unless you'll be my nephew's bride."

"Lord Abbot, let us cease fencing. You are no Cupid, nor, do I think, does Clement love me so greatly. He has position, as you say, so that marrying a Vetrell is a step down for him, not up. Surely he cannot need wealth, or if he did, he'd look to other maidens. Then why are you so strait with me, whom up till now you have been fond of?"

"I like your honest fearlessness. I always have since the day I took the fish hook from your hand. You were a child then, yet you did not whimper, though I hurt you sore. I have given you of my poor fund of knowledge—writing and Latin—at your father's wish, and, as you say, I have been fond of you—fonder than you guess." His voice faltered, then went on. "In fact my dream has ever been to dance your children at my knee. I sent for Clement to come here from Spain because I thought you'd make a good wife for him—far better than any of those women at Philip's court who tried to capture him. And, as I had foreseen, he loved you greatly—though you do not think it. He is of my own blood and, 'fore my God, I'd rather have you dead than wed to any other—"

"You still don't tell me why." Mary swayed a little as she stood.

"I'd rather have you dead than wed to any other," he had said, but he had not gone on speaking the thoughts that coursed through his brain. "I love you. I cannot wed you, who am wedded to the Church, nor would I take you otherways, but if you are married to my nephew you become almost my own. Your children will have Telva blood in them and be part mine on that account, so I can be content, for you'll be in my life for always. But if you wed another I should lose you. I could not suffer that."

To Mary he was a man who, up till now, she had thought of as her spiritual father, and for whom she had cherished a certain affection.

Today he had come to her from Sir Charles in a temper, though she now knew it must have been because her father refused to bend her will, she still resented it, and his obvious desire to wed her to Clement, who was a younger version of his uncle, and attracted her not at all.

At last the Abbot replied to her.

"Mary Vetrell, I have told you why. My nephew is dear to me as my own self. He loves you, so he must have you—and have you he will, for I'll see to it. As Tall Trees' acres join the Abbey lands, so shall you two be united."

"Perhaps there sits the reason. I have heard the Abbey lands are no longer fertile, which have been over-tilled, so Tall Trees' fields are coveted. Well, buy them of my father, if you will—but not through me." Mary's eyes flashed; she had forgotten the lie she had told.

"I care not for the land, though it is true the Abbey needs fields to grow grain, but my nephew has promised if he wed you that he will bide in England. That means much to me." The Abbot's fingers played with his cross. "Mary, I beg you—think again."

"I have thought. My answer is the same."

"Then," now the black eyes truly flashed, "I say the King shall hear and, too, I say that you and John de Winton may not wed, for I'll not say the rites, nor any other priest that you may find. In matters of the Church I stand supreme, and till the King decides the right of this you must rest as you are, and I shall pray, daughter, that God will soften your heart toward that poor boy Clement who spends his days in longing for you. I go now, but I shall come again. Take counsel, Mary Vetrell, with yourself and with your father. Nay," as she bowed her head, "today I have no blessing for one who disobeys her holy Father's commands."

He turned on his heel and went out the door without a backward glance. Presently Mary heard a clatter in the courtyard and knew that the Abbot was mounting the snow white mule he always rode. Then came the noise of hoofs and the Abbot Telva, escorted by his men-at-arms, left Tall Trees.

Mary sank into a chair and covered her face with her hands. Through her slim fingers tears fell spattering unheeded on the green satin. It was no light thing in those days to defy the Church, and Mary knew it.

A FIRM step sounded near her and a strong, mellow voice cried in her ear. "Zounds, Mistress Mary, are we to play peek-a-boo?" Firm fingers tugged at hers playfully, but when her face was revealed, the voice changed and became full of sympathy. "How, now, Mistress, has that Spanish knave upset you? If so, I'll wish I'd ridden him off that fancy mule of his."

Mary looked up into a typical English face.

"John," she whispered. "John," while the tears raced down her cheeks.

John de Winton had a clean-cut open

countenance with steady blue eyes. He was gentle and kind, but there was a stubbornness about his well shaped mouth that showed he would be hard to rouse, but ill to cross once he had been. His hair, yellow as corn, was cut square across his forehead and hung to his shoulders Dutch fashion. He had a great chest and arms, with a figure to match, and was the type of man that women love.

Now seeing Mary's tears, his brows tightened. Then suddenly he caught her in his arms, pulled her up, and began kissing away the tears.

"I cannot bear to see you weep, my love," he murmured between kisses.

It was well he held her firmly or Mary would have fallen with the shock. For a few minutes she leaned against him, her heart beating rapidly, and then she raised her head. As it chanced—or perhaps it wasn't chance—when she moved it was just enough so that John's lips, instead of touching her cheek, found her mouth.

IT WAS as if two souls met, mingled, and became one in that brief moment. When they finally drew apart he did not say, "I love you"—nor did she. It was not necessary. Enough had already been said for all eternity.

Mary's tears were gone and John's face was utterly content.

"If I had not wept," Mary laughed, "perhaps you would have gone on being silent forever."

"And so I might, who feared you did not love me."

"Oh, John, I have loved you all my life, I think, and often wondered why you did not speak, for I was sure you cared. Now I am grateful that the Abbot made me cry."

"When I saw you unhappy it was as though a force took me without my own volition, giving me the courage that I lacked. Quite suddenly I found you in

my arms where you must ever rest. Mary, when will we be wed?"

"Never, if the Abbot has his way. Listen, my love." Mary drew John to the window seat and there, sitting close beside him, her hand in his, she told all the story of her interview with Abbot Telva.

John did not interrupt her. When she finished his face was grave.

"Here is a sum whose solution is difficult to find. Our case is hard. The Abbot will not wed us, nor suffer his priests to do so. To come by one who would do it without his sanction, as we are in his See, is nigh impossible. Yet, wed we will, and soon. It must be soon. I like not that Abbot, nor his dark-eyed nephew. In truth that same Clement has haunted my dreams of late, for I feared you liked him more than you liked me."

"Foolish!" Mary rewarded him for his folly with the first kiss of her own bestowing.

A hearty laugh parted them. The perfect counterpart for Santa Claus stood in the doorway. Big, bluff and burly, Sir Charles Vetrell had the same cast of features as his daughter. Different though they were, the relationship between them was unmistakable. His snow white hair aureoled his benign countenance and he smiled with his entire face.

"So, daughter, I made no mistake when I told the Abbot you would choose your own mate—and you have chosen well. I, myself could not have done better. John always has seemed like my own son, and I had no stomach for that Spanish whelp, though I'd have been civil if you had taken him." His laughter sounded like the distant rumble of thunder. "But 'tis well you spared my disposition the strain, my child. Come hither, both of you, and have my blessing."

Hand in hand they knelt before him as he gave it, and when they looked up there were tears in his eyes. He wiped

them away with the back of his hand.

"I hope you will not take her too soon, my son, for Tall Trees will be empty and barren without her."

"It looks like we may not be able to wed for a long time, Sir Charles," de Winton spoke gravely.

Once more Mary told her tale.

Sir Charles grew serious. Hoisting his bulk into a chair he said, "This is a sorry matter. There has always been fighting between the Abbey and Tall Trees over the farthest fields. We Vetrells have the right of it, but I'd give up the land for Mary's happiness. But there is more than a matter of land here. The Spaniards know that Katherine is no longer loved by the King. They have heard, as I have heard, that Cardinal Woolsey, who governs the King and England, would pull her down and put a French wife in her place—keeping, of course, the golden dower that came with Katherine, for the sake of which Henry took her when his brother died. Now the Spaniards everywhere in England cement their stance by marrying into the families that count for something here, so when the struggle comes there will be strength behind the Queen. This Abbot Telve came with Katherine and has had much advancement. His Abbey of Chettleworth is one of the most important in the kingdom. He is quite right when he says you'll be hard put to it to wed without his help."

"It is not fair," Mary moaned, but John put his arm about her, and she gave up lamenting to ask, "What can we do?"

"The King is over all, and the Cardinal rules the King," Sir Charles said meditatively. "I know Woolsey. Once I did him a favor before he reached the heights of greatness. I do not think he has forgotten. I will write him a letter and John can ride to Hampton Court with it. I think he'll see justice done and be not overly anxious to favor the Spaniard."

John hit his hand against his knee and exclaimed, "Well planned, Sir Charles. I'll go to Hampton Court this very day, and if Woolsey helps not, I know one of Queen Katherine's maids, Mistress Anne Boleyn, whom I met in France. She might whisper a good word for us into the Queen's ear."

Mary drew back and looked at him very strangely. She was jealous and wondering if this same Anne Boleyn was perhaps the reason why John had delayed speaking of his love.

"It seems you are hasty to leave your new-betrothed, and over-quick to think of another lady," she said coldly, withdrawing her hand.

John caught it back again.

"I only go so I can make you wholly mine, Mary, and I do swear to you that till this instant I had forgotten Mistress Anne, though, in truth, she was very fair." His eyes twinkled.

Mary was about to speak tartly when her father interrupted.

"Peace; this is no time for petty bickerings. Mary knows right well you love her, John, and I hold that your idea of speaking to Mistress Boleyn is good, although if you do, you must ask her to whisper in the King's ear — not the Queen's! For it seems of late the King has found Anne Boleyn 'very fair'. John, you will walk a dangerous path at Court; see that you tread it carefully. Now I will go and write my letter to the Cardinal." Sir Charles heaved himself out of the chair sectionally.

"I ride this very day," John said, and then as Sir Charles neared the door, "would not you and Mary stay at Castle Winton 'til I return? The castle is well fortified in case the Abbot stirs up trouble. My mother would joy to welcome you."

Sir Charles pondered awhile, then nodded.

"A good idea, my boy. We'll keep Lady de Winton company until you re-

turn. I'll bid your woman pack your gear, Mary, so you can bide here 'til we leave. For in the fashion of lovers you and John have much to say."

Then he bustled through the door, and they heard him giving orders for awhile until his voice died away.

"Oh, John, I do not like to see you go to Court. Suppose the Cardinal is not friendly?"

"Fear nothing, Mary. We have two arrows to our bow. By one or the other I'll win you."

He held her close and Mary thrust her jealousy aside, and soon the joy of his kisses made her quite forget that he was going to see Mistress Anne Boleyn—who was "very fair."

A few hours later they were riding to Castle Winton where they were warmly welcomed by John's widowed mother.

Lady de Winton had been practically a second mother to Mary since Sir Charles' wife died giving her birth, so that when John told her he and Mary had at last come to an understanding she was overjoyed. But the other news sobered her.

"I do not like that Abbot, nor his nephew," she said. "The Abbot Telva's demands in tithes for the Abbey are exorbitant, and as for Clement, one of my farm men," she stopped, then went on, "told me he rode for Windsor but an hour ago!"

"To the King! I'd best to horse," John exclaimed.

"Ay, John, and beat the Abbot at his own game!" Sir Charles rumbled.

Lady de Winton bustled about seeing to the packing while John told his body-servant, Godfrey, to make ready and bring the horses. Presently the preparations were complete.

John said farewell, and he and Godfrey rode away.

Mary was very sad. She had only found her love to lose him, and her heart was

still greatly troubled over the fairness of Mistress Anne.

Lady de Winton, seeing her downcast, touched her shoulder.

"Nay, Mary, do not grieve. He will come back, and it is well you early learn the first lesson of a woman who loves—that of waiting. So often it is all that we can do. But be of cheer, for of your waiting joy will come, whereas some wait and wait," here she looked at Sir Charles from under heavy eyelashes, "and profit not."

SIR CHARLES started!

"Do you, by any chance, mean, Jane, that you would have listened if I'd—"

A faint smile played around the corners of Lady de Winton's mouth which, despite her forty years, was almost girlish.

"I would have, Charles—and will."

Mary regarded them both with wonder. Lady Jane standing beside her looked calm and beautiful, and Sir Charles suddenly seemed to have shed at least ten of his fifty years.

"Then," he cried, "though I am somewhat large, I still will kneel to ask your hand, for I have loved you a long time, Jane."

"Kneel not. Oh, Charles, you and that boy of mine had such close mouths it took the Abbot to play match-maker. Well, I will come to Tall Trees and keep you from being lonely when Mary is Mistress here. That is—" her dimples showed, "if we've your blessing, child."

"Oh, that you have, and I *am* happy—happier than I ever thought to be," Mary exclaimed.

There followed a general kissing and rejoicing, in the midst of which Sir Charles slapped his thigh resoundingly.

"Now if only John had not gone I could have sent word to the King of our intention to wed, Jane."

Now Lady de Winton's face flushed red.

"I did tell John to mention it to the Cardinal. I thought perhaps with Mary soon to wed you might—"

As Sir Charles took her in his arms she buried her face in his shoulder and Mary quietly stole away to tell her woman where to bestow her things, for she felt she was no longer needed.

She was very happy to think of her father and Lady Jane de Winton being united. Now if only Cardinal Woolsey would override the Abbot everything would be wonderful—almost too wonderful to happen. She was sore afraid, but there was nothing she could do but pray and wait—wait for John to return from Hampton Court. The journey there and back would take at least four days' hard riding, and there was no telling how long he would have to attend the Cardinal before he had an audience—for Woolsey was the honey pot that drew all the flies. Mary sighed. There was truly nothing to do but wait.

The next day nothing happened, except that Sir Charles wrote a note to John telling him that he would soon be his father in three ways—step-father, father-in-law, and father in heart, which indeed he had always been. He bade John tell the Cardinal and ask for King Henry's sanction to the nuptials. This he sent off by one of his own men from Tall Trees.

Of the Abbot they heard nothing, and two more days passed in quiet laziness. Lady de Winton showed Mary all of the Castle, and told her how she ordered things so that Mary would find it easy to take over its complicated management.

"If I only can," Mary murmured, thinking of John and whether the Cardinal would give them dispensation to wed, but Lady de Winton took it she meant that the Castle, being a bigger household than Tall Trees would be difficult to oversee, discoursed for a longer time on how it should be done, and Mary, whose heart

was with John, and not in these household matters, had to pay attention.

On the afternoon of the fourth day the Abbot on his white mule came riding to Castle Winton. The Castle's drawbridge was down. In fact there was little use for such things now in England as the times were peaceful and, beginning with the reign of Henry's father, the great Manor Houses, such as Tall Trees, began to replace the fortified and sturdy feudal dwellings.

As the mule clattered into the courtyard, Mary, watching from the leaded windows of the long gallery, wished that time could move back and they could defy the Abbot and the large escort he brought with him.

Mary waited in the long gallery and Sir Charles and Lady de Winton, at her request, stood with her.

THE Abbot paused in the doorway, making the sign of the cross before he entered, then he sat in the tall chair Lady de Winton offered and motioned the others to sit also. This they did, excepting Mary, who stood beside her father regarding Telva closely.

The Abbot of Chettleworth did not meet her glance; instead he addressed her father.

"Sir Charles Vetrell, I formally ask the hand of your daughter Mary for my nephew Clement D'Aigula, though I deem it strange to come to Castle Winton instead of Tall Trees to do so."

"A request you have already made at Tall Trees and which I refused then as I do now. Mary has made her choice—as she's a right to do—and will marry Sir John de Winton." Sir Charles was firm.

"And what say you, Mary Vetrell?" The Abbot's eyes focused on the girl.

"Nothing more nor less than I told you before, my Lord Abbot." This time, however, Mary's tones carried even greater conviction, for she now spoke the truth since John had spoken his heart. She knew

that though her life hinge on the balance she would wed no other.

"Then I have this to tell you. My nephew writes me King Henry gives his consent to his suit and decrees that you and Clement be married in the Abbey of Chettleworth some ten days hence, and furthermore," he raised his hand to still their protests, "the King himself will grace your nuptials, and the Queen also. They go on progress and will stop here for the purpose. Clement rides with them. He bade me give his heart's love to you, Mistress Mary and say only the King could keep him from you, but as the King himself brings him to your arms, he needs must restrain his ardor. For you," here the Abbot again turned his eyes on Sir Charles, "I have a writing. The King's Grace does you much honor for he will lodge at Tall Trees as the Abbey is not large enough to house his retinue. So you must needs return home and make ready."

Sir Charles sighed. Well he knew what entertaining the King meant. The Court would arrive like a bevy of ants to strip him bare. It was an honor—yes, but an expensive one. Still he would have to stomach it as best he could.

"My poor house is ever at His Majesty's disposal, and so am I, but with my daughter it is different. The Vetrell deed—"

The Abbot threw back his head and laughed.

"Cease drooling of the Vetrell deed. Did I not say one King can do away with the foolish deeds of another day? See, I make jingles of it. That's what I think of your Vetrell deed."

"A rhyme for a rhyme, Lord Abbot." Mary was white to her very lips, but she threw her head back like a charger going into battle.

"I'll be Sir John de Winton's wife
Or bravely end this bitter life

Before I share a Spaniard's bed
By my own hand I will be dead."

"No, Mary Vetrel, that you'll not do, for if you do you lose your soul. I here and now pronounce you excommunicate unless you obey the law of the Church. If you take your life no one will give you Christian burial, as you well know."

Mary trembled. It was a dreadful thing he was saying.

He played with his cross. "But that's not yet, child. I forgive your rash words and we'll make an end of rhyming. Get you ready for your nuptials."

Now, Mary, desperate with fear, threw herself on her knees before him. "Oh, Abbot Telva, I pray you, let me wed the man I love. Be again my friend as you have always been—the saintly father I can worship, not the bitter Abbot who lashes me with words that drive me mad. I beg you have some pity on me whose only fault is that I love Sir John." She put her head on his knees and raised her hands in supplication.

He drew her up by them and stood holding her so. "I will be generous. If you will give yourself to God and be a holy nun, I'll put my nephew by and see the King will understand."

"No—no," Mary shrank away, pulling her hands from his grasp, "I could not be a nun—I—"

"Then get ready to wed Clement, for John de Winton's wife you'll never be!" There was hate in the Abbot's face, but the three people in the room only glimpsed it for a moment. Everything happened so quickly that he was gone before anyone had a chance to even answer back. No one followed him for Mary had fainted, and it took the united efforts of Sir Charles and Lady de Winton to bring her to. Finally they were successful but when she had regained consciousness she moaned and sobbed until finally Lady de Winton

had her carried to bed and gave her a sleeping draught to ease her misery. It was the only comfort she could give, for as Clement had been successful John must have failed, and the outlook was black enough.

Later Sir Charles and Lady de Winton puzzled much over it for they could not understand why the Abbot was willing to give over his schemes if Mary entered a convent. They did not know his well-hidden, fanatical love for her, nor how her prayers had moved him, so that he had for the moment been willing to give up his dreams of helping Queen Katherine, his nephew and himself just to know Mary was safe and inviolate. In a convent he could see her and be in truth her spiritual father. That would be almost as good as dancing her children on his knee, or so he had thought in that brief moment. But he had been glad when she refused. When she was Clement's wife, the mother of his child, then he could be content—but only then.

Early the next morning they were all at breakfast when John's man Godfrey came to them weary and travel-stained. He said that John was well and staying at Greenwich where the King held Court, and gave them a letter his master had charged him to deliver.

Lady de Winton bade him go and get meat and drink after his long journey, which he was delighted to do.

WHEN they were alone Sir Charles opened the letter and read it aloud.

"To Sir Charles Vetrell, the Lady Jane de Winton and Mistress Mary Vetrell from John de Winton. Most urgent and private.

"I write these lines myself although my hand is poor, for it is not well that any other eye should see what is set down.

"I have seen Cardinal Woolsey. For love of you, Sir Charles, he has been kind, and, had I reached him before Clement D'Aigula got King Henry's ear, I would have better news to tell you. But as you most likely know by now I was too late. Still all is not lost. The Cardinal is on our side and will favor us, but at the moment dares not do so openly for he wishes no unpleasantness with those of Spanish blood. Mistress Boleyn I have seen and she is much interested and will try to soften the heart that needs to be softened. She bids me be of good cheer and sends her greetings to Mary and looks forward to meeting her. I come to Tall Trees with the Court. I have spoken much of the Vetrell ghost—that White Lady who walks in the narrow hall — how it always haunts Tall Trees when a Vetrell is wronged. The King desires to see the White Lady who, I have told him, resembles Mary—the White Lady who haunted Tall Trees when the third Sir Vetrell tried to go against the Vetrell deed and force his daughter to wed against her will; how, when he gave over and let her wed the man of her choice, as the deed stated, the ghost vanished and was seen no more until the night the Abbot pressed his nephew's suit, when the White Lady walked again. His Majesty is curious to see this visitation, so I hope the White Lady is not shy of royalty.

"Clement D'Aigula is here. I needs must be civil to him, but I'll pick a quarrel and send him to another world before he marries Mary. I still have hope, and send this ring to her who has my heart.

"John de Winton."

And there was a seal marked with the boars of Winton.

"Now I think the boy is mad, or I have

lost my eyes," Sir Charles announced. "For we all know well that Tall Trees has no ghost, no White Lady—nor was there ever question by any Vetrell of disobeying the Vetrell deed!"

"There's this to it," Lady de Winton said. "There's more to this than has been written down."

Mary put her finger on the mystery.

"John has some scheme wherein the White Lady plays a part. I think the Cardinal thought of it, or perhaps Mistress Boleyn, for it smacks of woman's wit to me. Still, if John wants a ghost that looks like me, I'll play the ghost for him if we can find some garb of white."

"I have a wedding dress from ancient days in an oaken chest that would fit you, Mary," and Lady de Winton began describing it. Mary suggested they get it and she try walking as a ghost.

"But first, father, give me the ring John sent."

Sir Charles gave her a twist of gilded paper. She undid it and revealed a blue enameled ring in which was set tiny stars of gold. She put it on her wedding finger which it fit perfectly.

"This shall be my guard until that day when John gives me another ring and calls me wife," she said, and then went off with Lady de Winton to search out the gown for the ghost.

That very afternoon they returned to Tall Trees, for there was much to do. Lady de Winton went with them to help make ready for the King.

A week went by in these preparations, a week in which Mary worked hard to stifle the pain in her heart. She had not much faith in John's ghost, but she practised her part diligently until she could go from her room to the narrow hall by the secret passage without a light, and Sir Charles swore in the dimly lit hall he could not see the panel slip back that let her into the hall.

"John has a ghost in you, daughter," he

smiled, "though, in truth, I cannot fathom what good 'twill be."

Nor could Mary, and the face of Clement dark and saturnine like his uncle's, only more handsome, loomed large before her.

Then a swift rider came to say the King and his retinue would be there in the hour, that they had stopped at the Abbey of Chettleworth for some good Spanish wine.

Mary sighed and clasped the ring John had sent her and held it to her cheek a minute before she let it slide back to its hiding place between her breasts. She had worn it on a gold chain ever since it had come. She was very unhappy for she saw no way out of the trap she was in and did not believe the ghost—no matter how realistically it was played—would open the door.

When the gay pennants of the King's banners first appeared she took her place by her father and Lady de Winton. She wore her rose-colored velvet gown, and beneath the tight bodice her heart fluttered like the wings of a moth against a flame.

It was a beautiful sight—that long queue of richly dressed people riding up the broad approach with its tall trees. There was no mistaking King Henry's massive figure, and Mary's heart almost stopped beating when she saw the Abbot of Telva riding beside him.

IT WAS not very long before the gallant company were dismounting and crowding into Tall Trees. Sir Charles had scarcely greeted his monarch, made obeisance to the Queen, when King Henry, whose narrow pig-like eyes had been darting about, asked, "Where is the bride-to-be?"

Mary's eyes sought and found John, who was standing a little behind the King, as her father led her forth.

John smiled as though he hadn't a care in the world and made a little motion of his head toward a very young, beautiful

girl, richly appareled, who was standing beside him.

Even in the stress of the moment Mary knew this must be Anne Boleyn, and she did not wonder that her young, fresh beauty overshadowed that of the ageing and somewhat grim-faced Queen.

Sir Charles led her before the King and at the same time the Abbot Telva motioned to his nephew to step forward. This Clement did, but Mary turned her face away from him.

"Now, of a truth, girl, with such a face I'd not wish to take you to the altar myself," the King said gruffly.

Mary, not daring to say what was in her heart, lifted her hands in silent supplication. Before she had a chance, even if she had found the words, the Abbot came forward.

"As you know, Sire, she is a stubborn girl whose heart is set elsewhere. But I warrant once they're wed my nephew can change that countenance to one wreathed in smiles."

"No," Mary cried involuntarily, but the King, ignoring her, spoke to the Abbot.

"I doubt it—I doubt it greatly, but I have passed my word to you and come Wednesday she shall wed your nephew; that is, unless the ghost, this White Lady of Tall Trees, says otherwise. For, know, Lord Abbot, I will not go against a ghost, and I have sworn to Sir John de Winton that if the ghost should make it plain it likes not this marriage to your nephew by walking in the narrow hall, or some such sign, then I will give the lady's hand so that the ghost be pleased."

"Sire," exclaimed the Abbot, "I have lived in Chettleworth these many years, and never before have I heard of the White Lady of Tall Trees."

At last Mary saw the scheme. She had guessed a little of it, of course, but now that it was spread before her in its entirety she understood John's unruffled man-

ner, and the swift pang of jealousy that had seared through her when she saw him standing beside Mistress Boleyn subsided, for if the plan had originated in Anne Boleyn's brain, it was a good one and she was grateful.

The King, meanwhile, was looking at the Abbot, and Mary, for the first time, dared to let her clear eyes rest on those dark brilliant ones set in the heavy-joweled face. He laughed roughly.

"Well, this night, Lord Abbot, you will have a chance to see the ghost, for I invite you to watch with me in the narrow hall—you and some others whom I will select, and if the ghost walks and makes her wishes known, you will abide by them as I shall. Now, enough of these matters. Mistress Mary, whoever your husband be, I myself will see you wed and wish you well. Sir Charles and Lady de Winton, I cry my blessings on your union, though to do so I take prerogative from Abbot Telva. And now if your cellars can afford some good stout English ale, I think my stomach would relish a draught of it."

MANY hours later Mary stood in her room adjusting the satin folds of the ancient bride's dress which Lady de Winton had produced from her oaken chest.

Down in the narrow hallway in an embrasure she knew the King, the Abbot, Clement, John and four other high placed lords were waiting.

The embrasure was far away from that place in the wall where the secret panel opened. The light was only where the King was so that, until she came within his radius, they would not see how she got into the hall and, with luck, she could depart again the same way. If the Abbot had not been one of the party she would have had no fear for the success of the scheme, for it was a time when men believed in ghosts and when superstition greatly over-rode better judgment.

The Abbot was a different matter. Only he suspected a trick. She had read that in his eyes, and she was greatly afraid that he would know and expose the fact that the ghost was flesh and blood.

She had had no chance to speak to John. The exigencies of the Court had prevented her coming close to him, or, in fact, to anyone except in passing. She had been well watched, and since Henry had stepped into Tall Trees she had had no word alone with anyone. Even now the hall outside her door was guarded and, in fact all of Tall Trees was filled by men-at-arms who made up King Henry's bodyguard.

Had it not been for the secret passage-way and panel there would have been no way for her to have gotten into the narrow hall. She rather wondered that Lady de Winton had not come to her, or her father, but Lady de Winton was probably in attendance on the Queen and Sir Charles, of course, would be with the King.

The clock marked near the hour that she had heard the King say. "The ghost will walk"—for while they had been at meat the King had talked much of the ghost—in fact, so much had he talked that Queen Katherine had asked to be of the party. But he had brushed her aside with, "Nay, Kate, 'tis best you only see the living, not the dead." And the Queen had given over.

Mary dusted a little flour, which she had made ready for the occasion, over her face and was pleased at the ghostly effect it gave her in the highly polished silver of her mirror. Then with a silent prayer she pressed the panel in her own wall that admitted her to the secret passageway.

HER feet went easily down the passageway, but when she reached the end of it and stood with her finger on the rose that would release the panel that would let her into the narrow hall she was terribly afraid. Her future, her lover, even her

life, hung in the balance of the next few minutes, but Mary had made up her mind, as she had told the Abbot, that rather than become Clement's wife, she would die by her own hand—no matter to what perdition she was consigned. She caught her breath and then pressed the rose.

A second later she was in the hall. It was very silent. The people waiting in the embrasure were not talking, but she could hear even breathing which told her they were there. Slowly, her hands clasped demurely in front of her, she walked the length of the narrow hall. It seemed to her that a little ahead of her was a white shadow. It could not be her own, nor could she distinguish very clearly because it was on the other side of the ring of light which came from the embrasure. It wasn't until she reached the edge of it that she gasped with horror, for on the other side, just stepping into the light as she was doing, was another ghost, another figure in white, only this figure had a veil over its face.

A cold, craven feeling went down Mary's spine and she stopped short just as the other figure did. Was this a ghost, a real ghost, a denizen of another world? Before she had time to put her quivering thoughts into a concrete form a bevy of voices reached her.

"These are no ghosts!" the Abbot's voice was full of scorn.

"Attach me those two!" the King's tone rang out.

Mary could not move. Perhaps if it had not all come so quickly she could have regained the passageway. Her knees were weak as water and would not bear her toward it. Presently there were more lights brought by men-at-arms and she was standing in the front of the King alongside that other figure whose veil he was lifting.

"Well, Mistress Anne," he exclaimed, "so you have taken to dabbling in the spirit world?"

Anne Boleyn, for it was indeed she, sank to her knees.

"Oh, Sire, I did but wish to play my part to bring two hearts that truly love together, for I believe that in all the world there is nothing so wonderful as love."

Henry raised her gently and a tender expression stole over his face.

"Your sentiments do you much credit, Mistress Anne, as well as your soft heart, but I have sworn an oath, and no false ghost can let me break it. Because your motive was so sweet I do forgive this masquerade." Then he turned to Mary and said sternly, though she thought she could read regret written on this face, "Mistress Vetrell, you, too, I forgive because your deceit was prompted by a motive I can understand." For one fleeting second his gaze rested on Anne again. "But I cannot change my decree. Apparently the Lord Abbot of Telva spoke truth. There is no Vetrell ghost, so you must marry Clement and I wish you well of it."

"Thank you, Sire," cried the Abbot, and Clement echoed his uncle's words and then stepped forward to stand beside her.

"No, no," moaned Mary, and just then Anne Boleyn put her hand on the King's arm and cried, "Look, Henry, look!" forgetting in the stress of the moment that she should not address the King in so informal a manner. They all swung around and there standing in the light the circle made was a woman dressed in white!

"Oddsfish!" cried Henry. "Don't tell me the Queen herself has joined this masquerade."

"No, no—can you not see? It is a ghost, a true ghost. Look, her garments are transparent!" Anne cried again.

THEY all looked and wonder grew upon them for it was true. There stood a woman with a sweet, kindly face dressed in long white robes. She stood there and they all could see her and yet they could look

through her too. She was nebulous, shining and translucent.

Sir Charles gasped.

"It is my wife—Mary's own mother come again!"

The Abbot began to cry and held up his cross.

"I exhort this figure, which must come from hell, to disappear!"

But the figure did not move and Henry, who was more courageous than the others, who had shrunk back gibbering into the embrasure, said, "Methinks, Abbot Telva, the figure comes from heaven, not hell, for she has no fear of you."

And it was true. Instead of disappearing, the figure walked toward the Abbot and, leaning over, whispered in his ear—at which the Abbot shrieked and ran from the hall, the black skirt of his cassock flying around his legs like a raven's wing.

Then the ghost of Mary's mother pointed to Clement who stood against the wall shivering. It pointed to Clement and then to the door, making plain in its sign language that it wished Clement to follow his uncle.

The King, who by now had recovered himself, though he continually made the sign of the cross on his broad chest, appeared to be enjoying the events that were taking place.

"Quite clearly, Don D'Aigula, the ghost will have none of you for its daughter, and as I swore to obey the spirits myself, neither will I. Get you gone, and tell your uncle that tomorrow either he or one of his priests will wed Mistress Mary to the man of her choice."

King Henry looked toward the ghost and seemed pleased when the visitation smiled upon him. Clement made haste to obey the King's commands and vanished from the narrow hall almost as quickly as his uncle had before him.

Then the ghost beckoned Mary and John de Winton out into the circle of light and,

holding her hands above their heads, she blessed them. Then with a little bow toward the King she gradually dissolved into the atmosphere.

A GREAT peace flowed over Mary. The benediction from her mother's ghost had wiped away everything but joy and the certainty that her life would be filled with content and happiness forevermore. At the very moment when all had seemed lost, and she had reached the nadir of hope, a miracle had happened. Mother love had materialized and made itself visible in all its manifold facets, and saved her and her love. Forgetting the fact there was an audience she turned to John. Their hands clasped, their lips met, and there was a completeness, a satisfaction in their kiss that she had never known before.

"Well, well, Sir John," the King's hearty voice swept them apart and to their feet, "such kissing had best wait until tomorrow when the maid is yours. And fear not you'll not have her to wife for I myself shall see to it and tuck you in your bridal bed with these two hands. See, Mistress Mary, I have been harsh with you because I was constrained against my will, for I want no trouble with Spaniards now—though later," he looked at Anne, "it may be otherwise. None felt worse than

I who saw two ghosts when I expected one—yourself, as Sir John had told me. How got you in the hall, Anne?"

"I hid in the corner after dinner before the guards were set, Sire. I feared Mistress Vetrell had no way to come for I knew the Abbot watched and Sir John forgot to tell me of the secret passage, but, oh, my heart was sore when I thought I had spoiled your plan." The lovely girl smiled at Mary who smiled back again.

"Well, we have seen strange things tonight—strange and wonderful things," the King mused. "A ghost blessed us all, I think, except the Abbot and his sister's son, who liked not her message. Well, the Abbot shall wed you in the morning, and you must bring your bride to Court, Sir John, for she and Mistress Anne should become friends, who have been sister ghosts. Yes, bring your bride to Court and we will make a place for you about our person. Come now, this has been thirsty work. I think some ale—"

Mary's hand snuggled into John's as they walked along behind the King who had given his arm to Anne Boleyn.

"Sweet," John pressed her hand.

A presage of the joy to come shot through Mary.

"I will be married in my rose-colored velvet gown," she whispered.