

# THE LADY OF LYNN

By SIR WALTER BESANT

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"Gentlemen," said his lordship, "there can be, I fear, no doubt. The abduction of Miss Molly has been designed and attempted by Mr. Rising. Fortunately he cannot have gone very far. It remains for us to find the road which he has taken."

"They fell to considering the various roads which lead out of the town. There is the highway to Ely, Cambridge and London, but to carry a chair with an unwilling lady in it on the highway, frequented by light as well as by day with travelers of all kinds and strings of pack horses, would be ridiculous. There was the road which led to the villages on the east side of the Wensley, and also the road to Swaffham and Norwich."

"I am of opinion," said one of the gentlemen, "that he has fixed on some lonely place not far from Lynn where he can make her prisoner until she complies with his purpose and consents to marry him."

"Captain Crowle shook his head. "She would never consent," he said. "My girl is almost as strong as any man and quite as resolute. There will be murder if this villain attempts violence."

"Just then the landlady of the Crown threw open the door and burst in. "Oh, gentlemen, gentlemen," she cried, "I have found out where they are gone! Hide after them! Ride after them, quick, before worse mischief is done. I have ordered all the horses in the stables to be saddled. There are eight. Quick, gentlemen! Hide after them!"

"Quick, quick," said his lordship. "Where are they? Where are they?" "They are on their way. They cannot be there yet."

"Mr. Rising ordered a post chaise to wait for him at 10 o'clock." "He left the garden," said his lordship, "about that time. Go on."

"He ordered it at the Duke's Head. The postboy told the hostler his orders. He was to wait for Mr. Rising at the Traveler's Rest on the way to Wootton."

"The Traveler's Rest? What kind of place is that?" "It is a bad place, my lord—a villainous place on a lonely road up and down which there is little traveling. It is a resort of pedlars, tinkers and the like, gypsies, vagabonds, footpads and rogues. It is no place for a young lady."

"It is not, indeed," said one of the gentlemen. "Gentlemen," the landlady repeated, "hide after him! Ride after them! Oh, the sweet Miss Molly!"

"Are the horses ready?" "They will be ready in a minute."

"Gentlemen, there are, you hear, eight horses. Captain Crowle will take eight. I will take another, making nine. I shall feel honored if you will accompany me, but on one condition, if you will allow me to make a condition. The man will fight, I suppose."

"Tom Rising, one of them replied, "would fight the devil."

"One could desire nothing better. The condition is that when we overtake Mr. Rising you will leave him to us. That is understood."

"My lord, we cannot, by your leave, allow your valuable life to be at the hazard of a duel with a man both desperate and reckless."

"I shall take care of myself, I assure you. Meantime, if I fall, I name Colonel Lanyon to succeed me, and after him, should he, too, unhappily fall, you will yourselves name his successor. Gentlemen, we must rescue the lady, and we must punish the abductor. I hear the horses come."

"CHAPTER VIII. THE DUEL. THE postboy, foreseeing events which might require a clear stage, warily drew his chaise off the road, which he widened into a small area trodden flat by many feet, into the grassy field at the side, and stood at the horses' heads in readiness."

"The men on the ladder, who were pulling away at the hatch with zeal, stopped their work. "What's that, George?" asked one. "Seems like horses. They're coming after the young lady likely. So he slid down the ladder, followed by the other, and they ran round to the front, selecting their poles in case of need. At elections and on the occasion of a street fight the chairman's pole has often proved a very efficient weapon. Handled with dexterity, it is like the horseman's staff, but heavier, and will not only stop a man, but will brain him or break arm, leg or ribs for him."

"For my part," Molly told me, "I should have them suddenly desert from me. I have a hunch they will stand off, and I have enough to admit of a man's passing through. I was waiting within, knife in hand. Do you think I would have suffered one of those fellows to have run upon me? Well, in the middle of their work they stopped, they listened, and they stepped down the ladder. What did this mean? There was no window to the left except a single frame of glass with half a dozen small diamond shaped panes, high up to serve any purpose except to admit a little light. I put my head through the hole in the hatch, and I heard—imagine my joy—the clatter of horses' hoofs and the voices of the horsemen. And then I knew and was quite certain that my rescuer had arrived. 'Jack,' I said to myself, 'has found out the way taken by this villain and is riding after him.'"

"Alas! I who should have been riding the front of the hill was at that moment unconsciously sleeping in my bunk aboard the Lady of Lynn."

"I thought that at such a moment my rescuer was coming after you, my dear Molly. Rising would be wholly occupied with defending himself. I therefore withdrew the boards from the top of the stable and looked down. No one was in the room below that I could see. I cautiously descended. In the corner of the stable by the fireplace was the old woman of the house. "They are coming after you, missy," she warned him. I told him that everything was against it. I read his luck by the cards and by the marbles and by the swallows. Everything was against it. They are coming. 'Hark!'

"I ran to the open door. Mr. Rising was in the middle of the road without his hat, his sword in his hand; behind him stood his chairmen. He was not going to give me up without a fight. The postboy had drawn the chaise into the field, and the sedan chair was standing beside it. And down the road, only a little way off, I saw in the growing light of daybreak Lord Fyningdale leading the captain beside him and half a dozen gentlemen following, all on horseback."

"There she is! 'There is Molly!' cried the captain. 'What cheer, lass? What cheer?' "Lord Fyningdale held up his hand. The whole party drew rein and halted. Then their leader dismounted. They were now about a hundred yards from the man who had attempted this injury to the lady of Lynn. He was on a battlefield where the bullets are flying. Molly therefore watched the fight with gleaming eyes and parted lips. She was almost ready to forgive the man who had attempted this injury for the sake of his courage, and she could not sufficiently admire his adversary for the cold and impulsive way in which he met every furious attack, just with a simple turn of the wrist, as it seemed to her."

"There was a tremendous lusty fellow, and he could fight after his fashion, which was with thrust upon thrust, fast and furious, as if reckless of himself so that he could engage his adversary wholly in defense until he found a moment of weakness. He had fought many times and hit or hurt always without a scratch or a wound, the fight always ending with his adversary prostrate. On this occasion, however, he found that every thrust was parried, that his adversary yielded not so much as an inch of ground and that he had to do with a wrist of iron, the eye of a hawk."

"Jack," said Molly, "I hope that I desired not the death of the young man, but I did desire his defeat. It was splendid to see him stamping on the ground and attacking like lightning. But it was more splendid to see his adversary immovable. He stood like a rock. He showed neither passion nor excitement. He parried every thrust with just a turn of his wrist."

"The gentlemen on horseback closed in and looked on, holding their breath. There was no longer any fear on account of their champion. For the first time in the lives they saw as a man, master of fence as ever came out of the schools of Paris. Meantime the other man was as one maddened. He drew back; he roared like a bull; he rushed upon his enemy; he panted and gasped, but he continued the fight undaunted."

Suddenly his sword flew out of his hand and fell in the field beside the chaise. "Pick up your master's sword," Lord Fyningdale ordered the chairmen. The spectators looked to see Tom run through on the spot. On the contrary, Lord Fyningdale remained in his attitude of defense. He was playing with his enemy. "Take your sword," he said. "You are at my mercy. But take your sword, man. We have only just begun."

Tom received his sword and wiped the mud upon his shirt. Then he renewed the attack. But it was with less confidence. That one should refuse to finish the duel when he had disgraced his adversary was a thing beyond his experience. "Tom is dashed," said one of the company. "It is all over with Tom."

"It was. After a few more lunges, parried with the same quiet skill and calmness of manner, Tom's sword once more flew out of his hand. Then the duel was over, for Lord Fyningdale made one thrust, and his sword passed clean through the right arm at the shoulder, passing out at the other side. Tom reeled. One of his chairmen ran to his help, and he fell upon the ground, fainting, in a small pool of blood."

Lord Fyningdale paid no attention to him. He wiped his sword on the grass, replaced it in the scabbard and put on his coat and waistcoat. This done, he advanced to Molly. "Madam," he said, "we are fortunate, indeed, in being able to effect a rescue. This is not a place for a lady, nor is this a sight that one would wish to see. I trust that no violence has been done."

"I thank you, my lordship. It was a horrid sight. Oh, do not let the poor man die! He is a villain, but he has fallen. Be merciful."

"Then the captain came running up. "Molly," he cried with the tears running down his face. "Molly, we are not too late? They haven't married you? The villain is paid. He is paid, I take it. He hasn't married you yet? By heaven, if he has I will brain him with my cudgel so you shall be a widow as soon as a wife."

"Captain, can you ask me? The man had a chaise waiting here and would have forced me into it. But I ran into the house and so into the upper floor, whither he could not follow. He set his men to pull off the hatch. What he would have done next I know not. But I could defend myself."

"What is that in your hand, Molly?" "It was the knife, which she still held in readiness. She threw it away. "I shall not need it now," she said. "What do you think I should have done with it?" "Molly, I know what you would have done. I said that there was no man in England who could marry you against your will. It was his heart and not his shoulder that would have received the blow. My dear, I knew my Molly. I knew my girl."

Then the other gentlemen crowded round, offering their congratulations, no one taking the least notice of the unlucky Tom, who still lay pale and bleeding on the ground. "It was Lord Fyningdale who came to your assistance. 'Here, fellow,' he ordered the chairmen. 'Take up your master and put him in the chair. So, and as for you,' he addressed the postboy, 'there is a guinea. Drive as fast as you can back to Lynn. Put him to bed in his lodging and send for a surgeon or a wise woman or some one to look after the wound.'"

"Will he die?" asked one of the bystanders. "I should think it not unlikely. His wound is dangerous, and, if I know anything about a man, from his appearance I should say that he would be inclined to fever. But we are not concerned with his fate, whether he dies or lives; he has attempted a very famous act and has met with a fitting punishment."

The carriage with the wounded man in it went rattling along the road, the jerks and bumps among the rods being enough to keep the wound open and the blood flowing. Then Lord Fyningdale called the chairmen. "Who are you?" he asked. "Do you belong to the town of Lynn?" They looked at each other. Then one said: "No. We be from Swaffham. Squire Rising sent for us to do his job."

"Put in your poles. You must now carry a lady back to Lynn. It is a long journey. 'It remains for us to escort Miss Molly home again. Madam, you may leave this foul den with the consciousness that you are avenged.' "Justice has done its work. Justice is not revenge. You can now, madam, go back in the chair in which you were brought here. The villain who made the attempt is already on his way back. Since you desire mercy rather than revenge, we must hope that his wound is not fatal."

So Molly re-entered the chair. Then she was brought home in triumph. The captain rode on one side, her champion on the other, and he rode her mounted escort. If she had been a queen, they could not have shown her greater deference and respect.



HE FALLS FROM THE SEDAN CHAIR OF A BOLD YOUNG MAN.

of their tender hearts, are carried away, out of themselves, by the sight of mere fighting. It is a spectacle which they cannot choose but gaze upon. It shows the true nature of man as opposed to that of woman. He stands up and risks his life, trusting sometimes to his skill, as in a duel with swords, and sometimes to chance, as on a battlefield where the bullets are flying. Molly therefore watched the fight with gleaming eyes and parted lips. She was almost ready to forgive the man who had attempted this injury for the sake of his courage, and she could not sufficiently admire his adversary for the cold and impulsive way in which he met every furious attack, just with a simple turn of the wrist, as it seemed to her."

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and a prayer book in her hand. There is a coffin in the cart."

"Anastasia, you are ridiculous! What have we done that all the world would not do if it could? These scruples are absurd, and these visions are fantastic. What is your share? You know that half of mine—all that is mine—is yours as well. You shall have my hand and my name. Those you should have had long ago had they been worth your picking up. Alas, Anastasia, no one knows better than you the desperate condition of my affairs!"

"What! I will obey you. I will go back to town. I will go tomorrow. The other parties in our innocence—they will also go back, I suppose?" "They will have done their part, Sir Harry and the colored and the parson; they will all go back. They cost a great deal to keep, and they have done their work."

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"You have already given me that assurance," She implied, perhaps, by these words that the assurance and the fact were not identical. "What can I give you except my assurance?" "Nothing, truly, but, pray, go on. I hear that you have been playing the part of the knight errant and fighting for distressed damsels. I laughed when I read of it. You are fighting on the side of the angels! Where are your wings, my Ludovic?"

"The thing happened exactly as I could have wished. The county bumpkin who carried her off had no knowledge of the fact. You have captured the girl and captured her with discomfiture. You have done all I wanted done here. You have given me a very good character. You have charmed the people of the spa. You have captured the girl and captured her with discomfiture. Why should you stay any longer?"

"To be sure, I am at great expense, and the bank is in a poor way. But what are you going to do?" "Anastasia, I have seen and took her hand. I have inquired carefully into the whole business. There is no doubt, none whatever, that the girl is far richer than even her guardian understands. She has a huge income, a great recommendation of money and what is more, a collection of jewels, which is in itself a large fortune. Go back to London tomorrow or next day. Then sit down and write a letter inviting the girl to stay at your house. Bid her bring with her all her jewels and finery. I, for my part, will urge the captain to let her accept the invitation."

"All this is very circumstantial. What then?" "I will promise the captain to find her a husband, a man of position, a man of rank, and, above all, one as virtuous as myself." He said this without the least blush or even a smile.

"Where is that husband to be found?" "As yet I do not know. He must be a creation of my own. He must not know; he must simply obey. We shall find such a person somewhere. I have, I believe, a good many of my former friends in the fleet or the king's army. Now, Anastasia, to find one of these unfortunates, to offer him an allowance, say a guinea a week, in return for a power of attorney to administer the property. True, there are the creditors, but we might take the money and not need it. He is suffered to get out." He went on suggesting details and villainies.

"You said 'we.' What have I to do with the scheme? It is, you must confess, Ludovic, one of those arrangements on which understandings which the world calls a conspiracy?" "Lord Fyningdale released her hand. Her words pained his sensitive soul. 'If at this time, after all we have done together, we are to talk of conspiracies, we had better act separately,' he said coldly.

"No, I am your servant, as you know—sometimes your most unhappy servant, but always at your command—only now and then it pleases me to call things by their proper names. At such times, Ludovic, I look in my glass, and I see not the Lady Anastasia in a company of fashion, but a poor wretch sitting in a cart with her arms stretched down, a white nightgown, her head

and a prayer book in her hand. There is a coffin in the cart."

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