

# **The Lady Rohesia**

Thomas Ingoldsby



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# The Lady Rohesia

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The Lady Rohesia lay on her death-bed!

So said the doctor, and doctors are generally allowed to be judges in these matters; besides Doctor Butts was the Court Physician: he carried a crutch-handled staff, with its cross of the blackest ebony,— *raison de plus*.

'Is there no hope, Doctor?' said Beatrice Grey.

'Is there no hope?' said Everard Ingoldsby.

'Is there no hope?' said Sir Guy de Montgomeri. He was the Lady Rohesia's husband; — he spoke the last.

The doctor shook his head. He looked at the disconsolate widower in posse then at the hour-glass; its waning sand seemed sadly to shadow forth the sinking pulse of his patient. Dr. Butts was a very learned man. '*Ars longa, vita brevis!*' said Doctor Butts.

'I am very sorry to hear it,' quoth Sir Guy de Montgomeri.

Sir Guy was a brave knight, and a tall; but he was no scholar.

'Alas! my poor sister!' sighed Ingoldsby.

'Alas! my poor mistress!' sobbed Beatrice.

Sir Guy neither sighed nor sobbed; his grief was too deep-seated for outward manifestation.

'And how long, Doctor —?' The afflicted husband could not finish the sentence.

Dr. Butts withdrew his hand from the wrist of the dying lady. He pointed to the horologe; scarcely a quarter of its sand remained in the upper moiety. Again he shook his head; the eye of the patient waxed dimmer, the rattling in the throat increased.

'What's become of Father Francis?' whimpered Beatrice.

'The last consolations of the church —' suggested Everard.

A darker shade came over the brow of Sir Guy.

'Where is the Confessor?' continued his grieving brother-in-law.

'In the pantry,' cried Marion Hackett pertly, as she tripped downstairs in search of that venerable ecclesiastic; — 'in the pantry, I warrant me.' The bower-woman was not wont to be in the wrong; in the pantry was the holy man was discovered, — at his devotions.

'Pax vobiscum,' said Father Francis, as he entered the chamber of death.

'*Vita brevis!*' retorted Doctor Butts. He was not a man to be browbeat out of his Latin, — and by a paltry Friar Minim, too. Had it been a Bishop, indeed, or even a mitred Abbot, — but a miserable Franciscan!

'Benedicite!' said the Friar

'*Ars longa!*' returned the Leech.

Doctor Butts adjusted the tassels of his falling band; drew his short sad-coloured cloak closer around him; and, grasping his cross-handled walking-staff, stalked majestically out of the apartment. Father Francis had the field to himself.

The worthy chaplain hastened to administer the last rites of the church. To all appearance he had little time to lose; as he concluded, the dismal toll of the passing-bell sounded from the belfry tower, — little Hubert, the bandy-legged sacristan, was pulling with all his might. It was a capital contrivance that same passing-bell, — which of the Urbans or Innocents invented it is a query; but whoever he was, he deserved well of his country and of Christendom.

Ah! our ancestors were not such fools, after all, as we, their degenerate children, conceit them to have been. The passing-bell! a most solemn warning to imps of every description, is not to be regarded with impunity; the most impudent Succubus of them all dare as well dip his claws in holy water as come within the verge of its sound. Old Nick himself, if he sets any value at all upon his tail, had best convey himself clean out of hearing, and leave the way open to Paradise. Little Hubert continued pulling with all his might, — and St. Peter began to look

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out for a customer.

The knell seemed to have some effect even upon the Lady Rohesia; she raised her head slightly; inarticulate sounds issued from her lips, — inarticulate, that is, to the profaner ears of the laity. Those of Father Francis, indeed, were sharper; nothing, as he averred, could be more distinct than the words, 'A thousand marks to the priory of Saint Mary Rouncival.'

Now the Lady Rohesia Ingoldsby had brought her husband broad lands and large possessions; much of her ample dowry, too, was at her own disposal; and nuncupative wills had not yet been abolished by Act of Parliament.

'Pious soul!' ejaculated Father Francis. 'A thousand marks, she said —'

'If she did, I'll be shot!' said Sir Guy de Montgomeri.

'—A thousand marks!' continued the Confessor, fixing his, cold grey eye upon the knight, as he went on heedless of the interruption; '— a thousand marks! and as many Aves and Paters shall be duly said — as soon as the money is paid down.'

Sir Guy shrank from the monk's gaze; he turned to the window, gaze, and muttered to himself something that sounded like 'Don't you wish you may get it?'

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The bell continued to toll. Father Francia had quitted the room, taking with him the remains of the holy oil he had been using for Extreme Unction. Everard Ingoldsby waited on him down stairs.

'A thousand thanks!' said the latter.

'A thousand marks!' said the friar.

'A thousand devils!' growled Sir Guy de Montgomeri, from the top of the landing-place.

But his accents fell unheeded; his brother-in-law and the friar were gone; he was left alone with his departing lady and Beatrice Grey.

Sir Guy de Montgomeri stood pensively at the foot of the bed; his arms were crossed upon his bosom, his chin was sunk upon his breast; his eyes were filled with tears; the dim rays of the fading watchlight gave a darker shade to the furrows on his brow, and a brighter tint to the little bald patch on the top of his head, — for Sir Guy was a middle-aged gentleman, tall and portly withal, with a slight bend in his shoulders, but not that much; his complexion was somewhat florid — especially about the nose; but his lady was in extremis, and at this particular moment he was paler than usual.

'Bim! bome!' went the bell. The knight groaned audibly; Beatrice Grey wiped her eye with her little square apron of lace de Maslines; there was a moment's pause, — a moment of intense affliction; she let it fall, — all but one corner, which remained between her finger and thumb. She looked at Sir Guy; drew the thumb and forefinger of her other hand slowly along its border, till they reached the opposite extremity. She sobbed aloud. 'So kind a lady!' said Beatrice Grey. — 'So excellent a wife!' responded Sir Guy. — 'So good!' said the damsel. — 'So dear!' said the knight. — 'So pious!' said she. — 'So humble!' said he. — 'So good to the poor!' — 'So capital a manager!' — 'So punctual at matins!' — 'Dinner dished to moment!' — 'So devout!' said Beatrice. — 'So fond of me!' said Sir Guy. — 'And of Father Francis!' — 'What the devil do you mean by that?' said Sir Guy de Montgomeri.

The knight and the maiden had rung their antiphonic changes on the fine qualities of the departing Lady, like the Strophe and Antistrophe of a Greek play. The cardinal virtues at once disposed of, her minor excellences came under review. She would drown a witch, drink lamb's wool at Christmas, beg Domine Dump's boys a holiday, and dine upon sprats on Good Friday! A low moan from the subject of these eulogies seemed to intimate that the enumeration of her good deeds was not altogether lost on her, — that the parting spirit felt and rejoiced in the testimony.

'She was too good for earth!' continued Sir Guy.

'Ye-ye-yes!' sobbed Beatrice.

'I did not deserve her!' said the knight.

'No-o-o-o!' cried the damsel.

'Not but that I made her an excellent husband and a kind; but she is going, and — and — where, or when, or

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how — shall I get such another?'

'Not in broad England — not in the whole wide world!' responded Beatrice Grey; 'that is, not just such another!' Her voice still faltered, but her accents on the whole were more articulate; she dropped the corner of her apron, and had recourse to her handkerchief; in fact, her eyes were getting red, and so was the tip of her nose.

Sir Guy was silent; he gazed for a few moments steadfastly on the face of his lady. The single word, 'Another!' fell from his lips like distant echo; — it is not often that the viewless nymph repeats more than is necessary.

'Bim! bome!' went the bell. Bandy-legged Hubert been toiling for half an hour; he began to grow tired, and St. Peter fidgety.

'Beatrice Grey!' said Sir Guy de Montgomeri, 'what's to be done? What's to become of Montgomeri Hall? — and the buttery, — and the servants? — And what — what's to become of me, Beatrice Grey?' — There was pathos in his tones, and a solemn pause succeeded. 'I'll turn monk myself!' said Sir Guy.

'Monk?' said Beatrice.

'I'll be a Carthusian!' repeated the knight, but in a tone less assured: he relapsed into a reverie. — Shave his head! — he did not so much mind that, — he was getting rather bald already; — but, beans for dinner, — and those without butter — and then a horse-hair shirt!

The knight seemed undecided: his eye roamed gloomily around the apartment; it paused upon different objects, but as if it saw them not; its sense was shut, and there was no speculation in its glance: it rested at last upon the fair face of the sympathising damsel at his side, beautiful in her grief.

Her tears had ceased; but her eyes were cast down, mournfully fixed upon her delicate little foot, which was beating the tattoo.

There is no talking to a female when she does not look at you. Sir Guy turned round — he seated himself on the edge of the bed; and, placing his hand beneath the chin of the lady, turned up her face in an angle of fifteen degrees.

'I don't think I shall take the vows, Beatrice; but what's to become of me? Poor, miserable, old — that is poor, miserable, middle-aged man that I am! — No one to comfort, no one to care for me!' — Beatrice's tears flowed afresh, but she opened not her lips. — 'Pon my life,' continued he, 'I don't believe there is a single creature now would care a button if I were hanged to-morrow!'

'Oh! don't say so, Sir Guy!' sighed Beatrice; you know there's — there's Master Everard, and — and Father Francis —'

'Pish!' cried Sir Guy, testily.

'And — there's your favourite old bitch.'

'I am not thinking of old bitches!' quoth Sir Guy de Montgomeri.

Another pause ensued: the knight had released her chin, and taken her hand; it was a pretty little hand, with long taper fingers and filbert-formed nails, and the softness of the palm said little for its owner's industry.

'Beatrice,' said the knight, thoughtfully; 'You must be fatigued with your long watching. Take a seat, my child.' — Sir Guy did not relinquish her hand; but he sidled along the counterpane, and made room for his companion between himself and the bed-post.

Now this is a very awkward position for two people to be placed in, especially when the right hand of the one holds the right hand of the other: — in such an attitude, what the deuce can the gentleman do with his left? Sir Guy closed his till it became an absolute fist, and his knuckles rested on the bed a little in the rear of his companion.

'Another!' repeated Sir Guy, musing; 'if indeed I could find such another!' He was talking to his thought, but Beatrice Grey answered him.

'There's Madam Fitzfoozle.'

'A frump!' said Sir Guy.

'Or the Lady Bumbarton.'

'With her hump!' muttered he.

'There's the Dowager —'

'Stop — stop!' said the knight, 'stop one moment!' — He paused; he was all on the tremble; something seemed rising in his throat; but he gave a great gulp, and swallowed it. 'Beatrice,' said he, 'what think you of —' his voice sank into a most seductive softness, — 'what think you of — Beatrice Grey?'

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The murder was out: -- the knight felt infinitely relieved; the knuckles of his left hand unclosed spontaneously; and the arm he had felt such a difficulty in disposing of, found itself, -- nobody knows how, encircling the jimp waist of the pretty Beatrice. The young lady's reply was expressed in three syllables. They were, -- 'Oh, Sir Guy!' The words might be somewhat indefinite, but there was no mistaking the look. Their eyes met; Sir Guy's left arm contracted itself spasmodically; when the eyes meet, -- at least, as theirs met, -- the lips are very apt to follow the example. The knight had taken one long, loving kiss -- nectar and ambrosia! He thought on Doctor Butts and his repetatur haustus, -- a prescription Father Francis had taken infinite pains to translate for him; he was about to repeat it, but the dose was interrupted in transitu. Doubtless the adage,

'There's many a slip  
'Twixt the cup and the lip,'

hath reference to medicine. Sir Guy's lip was again all but in conjunction with that of his bride elect. It has been hinted already that there was a little round polished patch on the summit of the knight's pericranium, from which his locks had gradually receded; a sort of oasis, -- or rather a Mont Blanc in miniature, rising above the highest point of vegetation. It was on this little spot, undefended alike by Art and Nature, that at this interesting moment the blow descended, such as we must borrow a term from the Sister Island adequately to describe, -- it was a 'Whack!'

Sir Guy started upon his feet; Beatrice Grey started upon hers: but a single glance to the rear reversed her position, -- she fell upon her knees and screamed.

The knight, too, wheeled about, and beheld a sight which might have turned a bolder man to stone. -- It was She! -- the all-but-defunct Rohesia -- there she sat, bolt upright! -- her eyes no longer glazed with the film of impending dissolution, but scintillating like flint and steel; while in her hand she grasped the bed-staff, -- a weapon of mickle might, as her husband's bloody coxcomb could now well testify. Words were yet wanting, for the quinzey, which her rage had broken, still impeded her utterance; but the strength and rapidity of her guttural intonations augured well for her future eloquence.

Sir Guy de Montgomeri stood for awhile like a man distraught; this resurrection -- for such it seemed, -- had quite overpowered him. 'A husband oftentimes makes the best physician,' says the proverb; he was a living personification of its truth. Still it was whispered he had been content with Dr. Butts; but his lady was restored to bless him for many years. -- Heavens, what a life he led!

The Lady Rohesia mended apace; her quinzey was cured; the bell was stopped; and little Hubert, the sacristan, kicked out of the chapelry. St. Peter opened his wicket, and looked out; -- there was nobody there; so he flung-to the gate in a passion, and went back to his lodge, grumbling at being hoaxed by a runaway ring.

Years rolled on. -- The improvement of Lady Rohesia's temper did not keep pace with that of her health; and one fine morning Sir Guy de Montgomery was seen to enter the porte-cochère of Durham House, at that time the town residence of Sir Walter Raleigh. Nothing more was ever heard of him; but a boat full of adventurers was known to have dropped down with the tide that evening to Deptford Hope; where lay the ship the Darling, commanded by Captain Keymis, who sailed next morning on the Virginia voyage.

A brass plate, some eighteen inches long, may yet be seen in Denton chancel, let into a broad slab of Bethersden marble; it represents a lady kneeling, in her wimple and hood; her hands are clasped in prayer, and beneath is an inscription in the characters of the age --

'Praie for ye sowle of ye Lady Royse,  
And for all Christen sowles!'

The date is illegible; but it appears that she survived King Henry the Eighth, and that the dissolution of monasteries had lost St. Mary Rouncival her thousand marks. -- As for Beatrice Grey, it is well known that she was alive in 1559, and then had virginity enough left to be a maid of honour to 'good Queen Bess.'