



*Lady
Godiva
at the
Springs*

**Mary
Roberts
Rinehart**

*** A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook ***

This eBook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the eBook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the eBook. If either of these conditions applies, please contact a <https://www.fadedpage.com> administrator before proceeding. Thousands more FREE eBooks are available at <https://www.fadedpage.com>.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. IF THE BOOK IS UNDER COPYRIGHT IN YOUR COUNTRY, DO NOT DOWNLOAD OR REDISTRIBUTE THIS FILE.

Title: Lady Godiva at the Springs

Date of first publication: 1909

Author: Mary Roberts Rinehart (1876-1958)

Date first posted: Nov. 14, 2020

Date last updated: Nov. 14, 2020

Faded Page eBook #20201128

This eBook was produced by: Mardi Desjardins, Jen Haines & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpCanada.net>

LADY GODIVA AT THE SPRINGS

By Mary Roberts Rinehart

Author of "Seven Days," "The Circular Staircase," etc.

I.

“DARNED funny, isn’t it?” Robson exploded, after a silence which marked a crescendo of emotions on the part of the kidnapped youth, beginning with mental confusion and ending with almost speechless rage.

“Funny? It’s delirious!” choked his abductor, feeling for his handkerchief to wipe away the tears. “Ten miles! Oh, my Aunt!”

The chorus of triumphant yowls from the half-dozen fellows on the station platform had faded now; the bumping of the heavy train over the switches in the yard, and an occasional snort from Carter, alone broke the stillness. Robson waited until the girl in blue had passed beyond earshot—she had been unconsciously responsible for the whole thing, having been the cause of an abstraction on Robson’s part that had helped the conspirators vastly.

When she had gone Robson turned almost wearily on Carter.

“I take it, from all this, that this train will not take us to Helmhurst—to see your cousins?”

“Cousins!” Carter’s glee threatened to inundate him again.

“Would it be too much trouble to tell me where I *am* going?”

To one familiar with Robson, his repression was ominous. Carter glanced up quickly.

“This is the Washington special,” he said. “Change cars in the morning for Richmond Springs.” He chortled again, but there was a touch of affectation now in his mirth.

“Who put you up to it, Bobby? You’re not original enough to have thought it out yourself.”

Carter had up-ended his suit-case and was sitting on it, swaying to the motion of the train. He was looking a bit uncomfortable; this was not the attitude he had expected Robson to take. Rage would have been funny, but there was something in his victim’s face that made him uneasy.

“It was a bet,” he conceded sullenly. “Pratt and some of the others bet I couldn’t get you away from that Daisy Vasey girl at the Empire for forty-

eight hours. I said I could. That's all."

Robson drew his breath in sharply.

"Thanks—for your interest," he said slowly. "I hardly expected it, seeing it was my own private affair. But since you've taken all this trouble, I'll just say this: first, as far as I know, Miss Vasey is a blamed sight better than that pack of Apaches we left back there. Second, your sacrifice in my interest is unnecessary. Miss Vasey is to be married to-morrow to the young gentleman who holds the pink sash in the rainbow chorus. You have merely saved me the pain of being present at the obsequies. Last of all, I have just seven dollars and twenty cents in my pocket, and I decline to draw any checks to pay for this delirious joy of yours."

Carter got up and picked up his suit-case. He was aggrieved: in some indefinable way the tables had turned. The joke was on him—not with him.

"I expect to stand for it," he said stiffly. "I've got mileage and a section. We can stay until Tuesday or so at the Springs, and——"

"Oh, I don't know," Robson interrupted him, growing cheerful as Carter became gloomy. "Why come back Tuesday? Let's stay a week. I hope you're not going to be piffling, Bobby."

Carter stalked into the car and flung his suit-case into the lower berth of his section. The snap had gone out of the affair: the gloom of the sleeper was reflected in his soul, and he failed to cheer up when, on shaking for the upper berth, Robson got it. That young gentleman was rapidly becoming cheerful, and he appropriated Carter's pajamas with an easy air of proprietorship that maddened their owner.

"What am I going to sleep in?" demanded Carter savagely.

"Wrap the drapery of your couch about you," Robson retorted, and, climbing aloft, proceeded to sit on the disputed garments until such time as he might be ready to don them.

Toward morning Robson wakened. It took him a minute or two to account for the swaying and general uncertainty of his couch. Then he remembered, and resentment against Carter was as fresh as the morning. Hazy plans for revenge flitted through his mind, leaving one absolute resolve—to make Carter as wretchedly unhappy as the circumstances justified; to make him wish he had never been born, or that he had passed away in early life; that he had done anything, in fact, but abduct his best friend and take him five hundred miles from home.

He opened the curtains and peered out. It was very dark, and divers sounds showed that his neighbors slept. With infinite caution, lying flat, Robson reached one long arm into the berth below and clawed at what, for a while, was empty air. After a time he was rewarded. A starched cuff and the sleeve it belonged to met his fingers, and with a long breath of joy he drew in his prize.

In the next five blissful minutes he tied two knots in each sleeve, pulled and jerked them until they were mere knobs of cloth, and then, in the absence of water, he soaked them with the contents of his pocket flask. When at last, sated with revenge, he tossed the wreck of what had been Carter's shirt into the berth below, he lay back with a long breath of satisfaction and dropped into the easy sleep of the pure in heart.

When morning came at last, Robson dressed hastily. Not for worlds would he miss Carter's face when he saw that shirt. Once in the aisle, however, he had a shock. Carter was reading a time-table in a seat near-by, and looked almost as serene as a man may who expected a lark and finds a white elephant.

"Your hair looks like quills on the fretful porcupine," said that worthy easily. "Better cut to the wash-room. She'll be up soon, and I'll present you."

Robson stared.

"The girl in the blue suit," Carter explained cautiously. "She had an upper, and I gave her my lower——"

But Robson had gone. Alone in the privacy of the lavatory, he doused his head with cold water and tried to forget knots in the sleeves and the generally dissipated condition of that unlucky waist. There was only one thing to do—hide in the smoking-room until she had gone. She had looked like a nice girl, too. Maybe she had another waist with her—almost certainly she would have. But suppose she had not! He folded up his six feet of misery in a corner of the smoker and moped, resenting Carter's attempts at cheerfulness with a few pointed remarks.

When the train finally stopped he waited wretchedly until every one had left the car. Then he stepped out and faced—her. Evidently she had waited, too. She wore her blue jacket in spite of the heat, and her state of mind was quite plain, even through her veil. As Robson stepped back to let her pass, her outraged eyes burned through the indifference that he wore as a mask, and he knew she *knew*.

As he followed her out of the car the unmistakable odor of stale whisky clung to her like an aureola, and Robson groaned.

It was not a surprise, considering the general fiendishness of things, to find her, a walking, tangible conscience, on the train for the Springs. Robson watched her covertly from the back of the car, and decided that the back of her neck and the way her hair curled around her ears was not unforgiving. But her profile looked very set indeed, and she held her chin well up.

It was forty-eight endless hours before Robson achieved a presentation, having certain knowledge that the lady in question had three times refused to meet him. At the end of that time he shamelessly offered her a glove he had seen another girl drop, and proceeded at once with his little prayer of forgiveness. She listened patiently.

“Really, what is it all about, Mr. Robson?” she asked when he had finished. “Have we—did we ever meet before?”

“No, strictly speaking, we did not meet, but we—almost met.”

“How very curious!” she said, and went out to a waiting run-about that was occupied by a young man also evidently waiting—for her.

They did not leave the Springs on Tuesday. Carter was more than ready to go, but his guest steadily refused to depart—for two reasons. The first and most important was that he had registered a mental vow that he would not move two miles from the hotel until Lois Collier had ceased tilting her chin in the air whenever she saw him. The other reason was psychological, and dependent somewhat on the first. He was driven into mischief as some men are driven to drink—by his lady’s coolness—and, having put the responsibility for the whole thing on the unlucky Carter, he gathered around him a band of a dozen followers and proceeded to treat the Springs to a livening up in the way of original sin that did credit to his invention, if nothing else.

At the end of four days Carter was at his wit’s end. He came to Robson’s room one morning when that young gentleman was rising late, after a ball given the night before to the colored waiters and chambermaids of the entire summer colony. Carter strode in furiously.

“Look here, Phelps,” he stormed, “there’s the deuce of a row downstairs. Where did you get that bisque figure you gave as a prize in the cakewalk last night?”

“On the mantel in one of the parlors. Why?”

“Why?” Carter was almost inarticulate. “Why? The management want it back, that’s all. And that mud-colored octoroon won’t give it up.”

“And why should she give it up?” Robson asked innocently. “She won it, didn’t she?”

Carter groaned helplessly.

“Then there’s another fuss about your taking that pony into the ball-room,” he persisted. “Half the old women in the hotel are there now, looking at the scratches. What possessed you anyhow?”

“That’s impossible,” Robson said gravely. “I give you my word of honor as a gentleman that I used every sock you possessed to pad that creature’s feet. As for the old women, they’re having the time of their lives. They ought to rise up and call me blessed.”

Carter gave up then, throwing back from the door a final entreaty.

“I wish you’d be more careful about letting your generosity run off with the hotel property,” he said. “Old Baldwin wanted twenty-two dollars for that figure, and if Lois Collier——”

“What about Lois Collier?” Robson asked abruptly.

“Well, she got the thing from Tillie—that’s the lady’s name—by offering her a bracelet, or something like that. Honestly, Phelps, I’m all in. I wish to thunder I’d let you stay in town. Look at me. I’m a wreck. Every time there’s something devilish on hand, you wear my clothes, and I get the credit.”

He slammed out, and left Robson staring at the door. He had heard nothing of the latter half of the tirade. So Lois Collier had bartered a bracelet for that atrocious Dresden lady with a pet lamb! Why had she done it?

After a search he found Lois in the dining-room, alone at her table, with a book propped in front of her and her luncheon untouched. She watched his approach with an unsmiling face.

“I’m not going to ask if I may sit down,” said the culprit, drawing out a chair, “because you are sure to say ‘no.’”

“I would indeed,” the young lady said severely.

“And yet—it is your fault that I am here, Miss Collier.” He picked up the menu and glanced at it while he spoke, for forty eyes of half as many dowagers were focused on them.

“My fault!” she repeated incredulously. “Why, I haven’t spoken ten words to you in three days!”

“To be exact, three and a third words a day. It is a low average, isn’t it? But what I meant is this: if you are still—er—unforgiving, why did you secure the Dresden lady and the lamb from Tillie? Not on Tillie’s account, surely. Hardly for the management. Then—why?”

Miss Collier looked uncomfortable. She chose her words with care, and without looking at Robson.

“I am sorry for Mr. Carter,” she said coldly. “He seems to have his hands full.”

Robson stared at her. Then he put down the card and leaned over to her.

“I think it’s time to clear up this whole thing, Miss—Lois,” he said slowly. “Carter’s idea of humor is to kidnap a man—without extra clothes, without money—to be exact, seven dollars and twenty cents—and carry him several hundred miles from home and mother. I made up my mind then that he’d change his idea of what’s funny. I think he has. You were the first victim——”

“I? When?”

“Never mind when. You were. And I want to tell you this. I’m not a natural idiot—I’ve had to work to acquire it. If you had been as—as forgiving as the back of your neck—I beg your pardon! I mean, if you had only forgiven that wretched waist——”

“I gave it to Tillie, in exchange for the Dresden lady—and the lamb,” she said severely.

“Because—you were sorry for Carter?”

“Yes.” But the “yes” was not so firm. She even smiled a little, albeit frostily, and Robson left the room feeling that he had gained ten yards for the goal.

All of which makes the sequel only more tragic. For as Robson left the dining-room and, treading on air, made his way along the hall, he met Carnahan the elder carrying a bundle and wearing a grin.

“They’ve come,” he said in a stage whisper. “The greatest ever—and the wig! You’ll have your notorious predecessor put on the blink, that’s all.”

Robson dug his hands in his pockets. “I’m out of it,” he said shortly. “I—I’m a reformed character. You can have your midnight revels without

me.”

“The deuce we can!” Carnahan dropped his bundle on the floor, and backed Robson against the wall. “Who got this up anyhow? Who’s going to wear those togs? They won’t fit any one but you or Carter.” Then, with a change of tone, “Oh, say, Phelps, for heaven’s sake, don’t go back on us now! We’ve got the horse and the banners and everything.”

Robson was visibly weakening, but he made one last clutch at his departing resolve.

“Get Carter,” he suggested.

“Carter’s borrowed the Rodgers bubble and is taking Miss Collier to the dance at the Country Club.”

“So it has been on Carter’s account, after all.” Robson stooped and picked up the bundle recklessly.

“Come and try ’em on,” he threw back at the relieved Carnahan.

II.

THE largest spring, perhaps a quarter of a mile from the hotel, had been roofed over, walled in, and fitted with chairs and benches into a rest-house. From its portals, dignified during the day by the presence of crocheting dowagers and rheumatic elderly gentlemen, came that midnight a strange procession. It made its way quietly enough to the edge of the woods, where a halt was called and the torches were lighted.

Thus revealed were a dozen masked gentlemen, doubleted, breeched, and hosed in the modern conception of mediæval dress. By twos they marched, heralded by trumpeters, and each bearing a flambeau that smelled modernly of kerosene. And in the full glare of the shameless lights, mounted on a white palfrey and sitting side-fashion, was a Lady Godiva of pink fleshings, mask, and blonde wig—a wig which hung over its wearer's broad shoulders as their only mantle. The rest of the party were in high spirits, but the Lady Godiva was sulky.

"It's darned cold," she said, in a heavy, masculine voice. "Why don't you hurry and get it over?"

"That's not the spirit for a revel," one of the Burghers put in, with a slight Irish accent. "You're a pretty warm proposition, Phelps; you oughtn't to be cold. Where's Peeping Tom?"

From somewhere in the rear a wretched darky was hustled forward, labelled with a large card, and blinded with a bandage. When he had been securely tied to the palfrey's tail the pageant moved forward. At the foot of the drive up to the hotel the Lady Godiva balked again.

"I'm not going up there without a blanket," she snarled, giving the reins a jerk. "I'm not going to be paraded about that hotel like this. Suppose they recognize me?"

"'But prove me what it is I would not do,' " quoted Carnahan under the beard of the Chief Burgher of Coventry. "Your own mother wouldn't own you, Robson. She would call you 'that creature.' "

The procession moved on with dignity, preceded out of the night by ambitious and mournful trumpeting, heralded by the light of a dozen torches. The hotel turned out of bed to see it in force and a remarkable

variety of costume, and the Lady Godiva shrank in her fleshings and found the blonde wig anything but reliable as a covering.

Past the hotel—down the drive—through the town, where the horrified villagers watched them through modest shutters—past a hay wagon filled with young people, and at such unexpectedly close quarters that the Lady Godiva begged her escort piteously for an umbrella, an overcoat, anything. And then at last into the woods again, where the friendly shades of night covered the Lady, and where, secure from discovery, she doffed the mask and damned her escort, the whole affair, and her particular part in it especially.

“What’s wrong with you, anyhow?” Carnahan asked, aggrieved. “It’s been the biggest thing ever. I’ll bet some of those old ladies won’t make their hair lie flat for a week. You were a dream. You’ve got Lady Griselda and Godiva and the whole bunch of antiquities beat to a finish.”

Like the lamps of the seven foolish virgins, the torches had not been freshly filled. Now in the gloom, they began to die away, in an odor that was not of sanctity. The excitement over, some of the ardor died too, and it was a footsore and generally disgusted party that drew up at the rest house and turned the white horse over to Peeping Tom.

Two lamps were still burning. The Lady Godiva, holding her yellow hair in her hand, walked stiffly into the building and stamped to get up her circulation. All around was a bustle of removing wigs and beards, of long ulsters being sorted out and put on, and a running series of comments. Robson sauntered over to the corner where he had left his clothes, and stood there for a moment, gazing at an empty bench. The night air came through the window above it and made him shiver, and on the sill, in the half light, was one of his shoes. That was all.

“What sort of a joke do you fellows call this?” he growled, glaring around the room. There was an instant silence; then Carnahan came over and took in the situation at a glance.

“Joke!” he said. “Fellows, did any one hide Robson’s clothes? Speak up: he’ll catch his death here.”

There was a chorus of negatives, and the conclusion was inevitable. Some one had stolen the clothes through the open window, leaving one shoe, and, on the ground outside, a pathetically inadequate necktie. Robson’s gloom deepened.

“I don’t care about the clothes,” he said; “they were Carter’s anyhow. But if there’s anything cooler at three in the morning than silk tights and the tinkle of that infernal spring, I don’t know it.”

A hurried inventory showed that there was not an article of modern apparel to spare. In most cases a single ulster covered a multitude of omissions.

It was finally arranged that the party get to the hotel as quietly as possible and send back one of their number with the necessary sops to the proprietries and a glass of hot toddy for Robson’s chilled frame. At a quarter past three the Lady Godiva settled herself in a chair, with a doublet or two over her knees, and a torch on either side for warmth, and tried to forget that he was a young ass who deserved all he had got—and more.

Robson hardly knew it was raining. It began gently, with a tap-tap on the wooden roof. Then suddenly, with a burst of fury that swept it in through the open windows and beat him back when he tried to close them. And then, above the turmoil, he heard voices.

“I can’t run—another step,” a girl’s voice panted. And a masculine one encouraged her.

“We’re right there. Be careful of the step. Now!”

Robson hurled himself against the door just in time. It gave a little, enough to send a bit of yellow light through the opening. Then it shut with a bang.

“There’s some one in there,” the feminine voice quavered. “Oh, don’t go in.” But Carter—of course it was Carter—only put his shoulder against the door and pushed with all his might. The door gave a little—and shut.

“Let us in!” he shouted above the storm. “What do you mean in there? It’s—raining!”

“Can’t,” came a frantic, familiar voice. “For heaven’s sake, go away.”

“There’s a girl out here,” bawled Carter. “If that’s you, Robson, open the door. Miss Collier is getting drenched.”

“Have you got a blanket?” came the voice, very close.

“No! If you don’t open the door, I’ll come through the window.”

“Look here, in the interests of decency, have you got anything on you can spare? I—my clothes have been stolen.”

In answer Carter stripped off his long road ulster.

“Open the door,” he called. “Here’s something. And for heaven’s sake, don’t wait to primp. We’re soaked.”

Then the door opened and Lois stepped in. Robson stood in the midst of a litter of scattered papers and overturned chairs in the smoky light of two kerosene torches. He was clad in one shoe and a dripping automobile coat, and below the coat was a foot and a half of pink silk tights. Trailing behind him, where he had dropped it, was a golden wig of luxuriant tresses. The girl gasped; then she leaned against the door and laughed, laughed until she ached, until pure fatigue made her drop breathless onto the bench.

Carter’s face was a study. As for Robson, he had thrust his hands deep into the ulster pockets and was trying to look as if he did not realize the deficiencies of his costume.

“Hard rain, isn’t it?” he said, as a fresh downpour struck the roof. “I—I hope you are not wet, Miss Lois.”

“Wet!” Carter snapped. “No. We’re not wet. That crazy car broke down and we’ve walked about a mile. Look here, Phelps, what devilry have you fellows been up to to-night?”

“It was a historical pageant,” Robson justified himself. “We’re away behind the old world in those things—no traditions, and—and all that,” he trailed off, avoiding the girl’s eyes. It was so evident that she was trying not to see the pink tights.

“What historical pageant?” demanded Carter. “The Garden of Eden?”

“No!” Robson was scandalized. “What do you think I am? It was—Godiva, Lady Godiva. I would have been all right if some one hadn’t stolen my clothes.”

Carter glared helplessly.

“It’s a wonder they were not *my* clothes,” he said bitterly. “You usually wear mine when you’re bent on trouble.”

“They were—yours,” Robson admitted meekly.

Carter was speechless. Then, as if he needed air, he went to the door and jerked it open.

“I’m going to the hotel for an umbrella and a mackintosh for you, Lois,” he snapped, and fled.

“Lois?” Robson repeated. “Are you ‘Lois’ to him?”

The girl looked uncomfortable.

“Just in times of stress. You see, I am sorry for him—he seems——”

“To have his hands full,” finished Robson. “Well, he has. He deserves to. I’m not going to defend myself—‘Lois’—this is a time of stress”——as she attempted to protest. “I—tried to get out of this thing to-night, and if you hadn’t gone to the club with Carter, I would have been virtuously asleep. But—when you went away I didn’t care——”

“That’s a very slender thread to hang an excuse to,” she said severely. “I can’t be around all the time, you know.”

“Oh, yes, you can, if you want to. Lois, if—if you would only take me in hand for better or worse! I know this isn’t the conventional time or place, but I——”

Lois had dropped back into her chair.

“You are not—proposing to me!” she gasped.

“That’s the way I meant it”——humbly. He dropped his long length into a chair beside her. “But perhaps I’d better put it off——”

“Until you grow up,” she supplemented promptly.

“That’s right—laugh,” he said gloomily. “No matter what I do, I’ll always be a clown to you. The first time I saw you I—I had to make you unhappy, and now I choose a time when, by every instinct of a gentleman, I ought to be hiding behind a rain-barrel, to tell you I love you. I’m a ghastly failure, that’s all. I’m going away to join a circus.”

The rain was coming down more gently now. Some one was striding briskly down the wet boardwalk, slipping now and then with a muttered ejaculation. The girl listened, then she turned to the dejected mummer beside her.

“Don’t join the circus,” she said gently, “and don’t wait until you grow up. Come—and tell me—no, not now—come and tell me—in the morning.”

Carnahan stopped in the doorway and stared. He had a nondescript bundle of garments in one hand and a glass of something hot in the other.

Inside the spring house Robson stood looking into Lois Collier’s eyes. Something in the girl’s face made Carnahan gasp; then he absently raised the glass to his lips and drained its steaming contents.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

A cover has been created for this eBook.

[The end of *Lady Godiva at the Springs* by Mary Roberts Rinehart]