

MOLLY MILLER

A STORY OF LOVE AND THE SEA

(Continued from last week)

"Now, what can we do? To denounce Lord Fyngdale on this evidence would be impossible. To allow this marriage to take place without warning the captain would be a most wicked thing."

"Let me send Jack," said my father. "The boy is only a simple sailor, but he loves the girl. He will now be aboard his ship."

"It is not far from the Crown to the quay, nor from the quay to any of the ships in port. I was sitting in the cabin, melancholy enough, about 8 o'clock or so, just before the sunset when I heard a shout, 'Lady of Lynn, I heard a shout. You may be sure that I obeyed the summons with alacrity.'"

"No one else had yet arrived at the Crown. The vicar laid both letters before me. Then, as when one strikes a spark in the tinder and the match ignites, so did the scheme of villainy flash upon me, not all at once—one does not at a glance comprehend a conspiracy so vile—but part, I say, I did understand."

"Sir," I gasped, "this is more opportune than you suspect. Tomorrow morning at 6 at St. Nicholas' church we are to be married secretly. Oh, a gambler, a rake, one who has wasted the patrimony, to marry Molly—our Molly! Sir, you will interfere. You will do something. It is the villain, Sam. He was always a liar, a cur, a villain!"

"Steady, boy, steady," said my father. "It helps not to call names. 'It is partly revenge. He dared to make love to Molly three years ago. The captain cudgeled him handsomely, and I was there to see. It is revenge on my part. He hath brought down this noble lord to marry an heiress, knowing the misery he is preparing for her. Oh, Sam, if I had been there!"

"Steady, boy," said my father again. "The spread abroad the many virtues of this noble villain? Sam Semple is his service, a most base and dishonourable service. Mr. Purden, the man who writes ribald verses—I thought of the Lady Anastasia, but rejected. She at least had nothing to do with this marriage. So far, however, there was much explained."

"What shall we do?" "We must prevent the marriage of tomorrow. The captain knows nothing of Lord Fyngdale's persuasion. Molly cannot marry her publicly, because he cannot join a wedding feast and people so much below him. Molly must not keep that engagement if I take to lock the door and keep the key."

"There is also that grave and reverend divine—
"The man Purden. He is notorious for writing ribald verses and for leading a life that is a disgrace to his profession."
"There is also the Lady Anastasia."
"I know nothing about her ladyship except that she keeps the bank, as they call it, every evening and that the gambling table allures many to their destruction."

"My friends," said the captain, "what am I to do?"
"You must make inquiry. You must tell Lord Fyngdale that things have been brought to you; that you cannot believe them if, as is possible, you do not, but that you must make inquiries before trusting your ward to his protection. You are her guardian, captain."

"I am more than her guardian. I love her better than if she was my own child."
"We know you do, captain. Therefore write a letter to him. Tell him these things. Say that you must have time to make these inquiries. I will help you with the letter. And tell him as well that you must have time to draw up settlements. If he is honest, he will consent to this investigation into his private character. If he wants Molly and not her money bag, he will at once agree to the settlement of her fortune upon herself."

"I am an old fool, I suppose," said the captain. "I have believed everything and everybody. Yet I cannot, no, my friends, I cannot think that this man, so proud, so brave, who risked his life for Molly, is what this letter says."
"Other letters say the same thing. Now, captain, let us write."

The letter which was dictated by the vicar was duly written, signed and sealed. Then it was sent up stairs to his lordship's private room.

CHAPTER XIII
A RESPIRE.
AS was one who carries a respite for a man already in the cart and on his way to Tyburn, or I was as one who himself receives a respite on the way to Tyburn, for if the charges in those letters were true there could be no doubt as to the result of an inquiry. Nor could there be any doubt that Lord Fyngdale in such a case would refuse an inquiry. I ran therefore, as if everything depended on my speed, and I arrived breathless at the garden restlessly. The sun was now set, but the glow of the sky lingered and her face was flushed in the western light. "Jack," she cried, "I thought we had parted this afternoon! What has happened? You have been running. What is it?"

"A good deal has happened, Molly. For one thing, you will not be married tomorrow morning."
"Why not? Is my lord ill?"
"Not that I know of, but you will not be married tomorrow morning."
"You talk in riddles, Jack."
"Would you like to put off the wedding, Molly?"
"Alas, if I could put it off altogether! I am downhearted over it, Jack. It weighs me down like lead. But there is no escape."
"I think I have in my pocket a means of escape—a respite at least—unless there are worse liars in the world than those we have at Lynn."
"Liar at Lynn, Jack? Who are they? Oh, Jack, what has happened?"
"I sat down on a garden bench. 'Molly,' I said, 'you hold the private character of Lord Fyngdale in the highest esteem, do you not?'"
"There is no better man living. This makes me ashamed of being so loath to marry him."
"Well, but, Molly, consider. Who has bestowed this fine character upon his lordship?"
"Everybody who knows him—Sam Semple for one. He is never weary of singing the praises of his patron."
"He is a grateful soul and, on his own account, a pillar of religion. I will show you presently what an ornament he is to religion. Who else?"
"The Rev. Benjamin Purden, once his tutor. Surely he ought to know better. I will show you presently how admirable a witness to character this reverend divine must be esteemed."
"There is Sir Harry Malyn, who assured us that his lordship is thought to be too virtuous for the world of fashion."
"He is himself, like the parson, a fine judge of character. Is that all?"
"No. The Lady Anastasia herself spoke to me of his nobility."
"She has also spoken to me—of other things. See here, Molly. I lugged out the two letters. 'What I have here contain the characters of all these excellent persons—the latest scandals about them, their reputations and their practices.'"
"But, Jack, what scandals? What reputations?"
"You shall see, Molly. Oh, the allegations may be false, one and all. For what I know Sam may have the wings of an archangel, and Mr. Purden may be already overripe for the new Jerusalem. But you shall read."

"I offered her the letters. 'No,' she said. 'Read them yourself.'"
"The first, then, is from my father's first cousin, Zackary Pentecoste, a bookseller in Little Britain, which is a part of London. He is, I believe, a respectable, God-fearing man. You will observe that he does not vouch for the truth of his information."
"I then read at length the letter which you have already heard."
"What do you think, Molly?"
"I don't know what to think. Is the world so wicked?"
"Here is another letter, concerning the Rev. Benjamin Purden. Observe that this is another and an independent witness." So I read the second letter, which you have also heard.

"What do you think of this worthy gentleman, Molly?"
"Oh, Jack, I am overwhelmed! Tell me more, what it means."
"It means, my dear, that a ruined gambler thought to find an heiress who would know nothing of his tarnished reputation. She must be rich. All he wanted was her money. She must not have her money tied up; it must be all in his own hands, to do with it what he chose—that is to say, to dissipate and waste it in riot and raking and gambling."
"Lord Fyngdale? Jack, think of his face, think of his manners. Are they such as you would expect in a rake?"
"There are perhaps different kinds of rakes. Tom Rising would spend the night drinking and bawling songs. Another kind would practice wickedness as eagerly, but with more politeness. What do I know of such men? Certain I am that Lord Fyngdale would not scour the streets and play the Mohawk, but that he has found other vices more pleasant and more, apparently, polite is quite possible."

"I don't understand, Jack. All the gentlemen like Mr. Rising drink and sing. Do all gentlemen who do not drink practice other vices?"
"Well, Molly, you have seen the vicar taste a glass of wine. He will roll it in the glass; he will hold it to the light, admiring the color; he will inhale the fragrance; he will drink it slowly, little by little, sipping the contents, and he will not take more than a single glass or two at the most. In the same time Tom Rising would have gulped down a whole bottle. One man wants to gratify many senses; the other seeks only to get drunk as quickly as he can. So, I take it, with the forbidden pleasures of the world. One man may cultivate his taste; the other may be satisfied with the coarse and plentiful debauchery. This is not, however, talk for honest folk like you and me."
"Go on with your story, Jack. Never mind the different ways of wickedness."

"Well, he heard of an heiress. She belonged to a town remote from fashion—a town of simple merchants and sailors. She was very rich; much richer than he at first believed."
"Who told him about this heiress?"
"A creature called Sam Semple, whom the captain once cudgeled. Why, Molly, it was revenge. In return for the cudgeled he would place you and your fortune in the hands of a man who would bring misery upon you and ruin on your fortune. Heavens, how the things work out! And it happened just in the nick of time that a spring was found in the town—a spring whose medicinal properties—'Ha! I jumped on my feet.' 'Molly, who found that spring? Sam Semple. Who wrote to the doctor about it? Sam Semple. Who spread abroad a report that the physicians of London were sending their patients to Lynn? Sam Semple. How many patients have come to us from London? None, save and except only the party of those who came secretly in his lordship's train to sing his praises and to work his wicked will. Why, Molly?—I burst into a laugh. For now I understood, and so some times does understand, suddenly and without proof other than the rapid conclusion, the full meaning of the whole."
"Molly, I say, there has never been any medicinal spring here at all. The doctor's well is but common spring water. There are no cures. The whole business is a plan, a bit, an invention of Sam Semple!"

"Jack, have a care. How can that be when the doctor has a long list of cures?"
"I know it, but I do know that Sam Semple invented the spa in order to bring this invasion of sharpers and gamblers and heiress hunters. Oh, what a liar he is! What revenge!"

What cunning! What signal service has this servant of the devil rendered to his master?"
"Truly I was carried out of myself by this discovery, which explained everything."
"So," I went on, "they came here all the way from London, their lying excuse that they were ordered here by their physicians, and we, poor simple folk, fell into the snare. All the country-side fell into the snare, and we have been fooled into drinking common water and calling it what you please, and we have built gardens and engaged musicians and created a spa, and, oh, heavens, what a liar he is! What a liar! This comes, I suppose, of being a poet."

Then Molly laid her head upon my arm. "Jack," she said very seriously, "do you really believe this story? Only consider what it means to me." Molly was more concerned about Lord Fyngdale than about Sam Semple.
"I believe every word of it, Molly. I believe that they have all joined in the conspiracy, more or less; that they have all got promises and that tomorrow morning, if you do not refuse to meet this man in St. Nicholas' church, you will bring upon yourself nothing but misery and ruin."
"I have promised to meet him. I must at least send him a message, if only to say that I shall not come."
"I should like to send him nothing, but you are right. It is best to be courteous. Well, you may send him a letter. I will myself take it to the Crown."
"But afterward, Jack? What shall we do afterward? If he is innocent, he will take offense. If not—"
"If you were engaged to marry a young merchant, Molly, or to a skipper and you heard rumors of bankruptcy, drink or evil courses, what would you do?"
"I would tell him that I had heard such and such about him, and I should ask for explanations."
"Then do exactly the same with Lord Fyngdale. He is accused of certain things. He is bound to inquire. Why, the vicar himself says that he would, if necessary, in order to ascertain the truth, travel all the way to London, there to learn the foundations, if any, for these charges, and afterward into Gloucestershire, where his country mansion stands, to learn on the spot what the tenants and the people of the country know of him."
"But suppose he refuses explanations. He is too proud to be called to account."
"Then send him packing. Lord or no lord, proud or humble, if he furnishes explanations, if these things are untrue, then—why, then you will consider what to do. But, Molly, I do not believe that any explanations will be forthcoming and that your noble lover will carry it off to the end with the same lofty pride and cold mien."
"Let us go into the parlor, Jack. There are the captain's writing materials. Help me to say what is proper. Oh, is it possible? Can I believe it? Are these things true? That proud man, raised above his fellows by his virtues and his rank and his principles! Jack, he risked his life for me."
"Ask no more questions, Molly. We must have explanations. Let us write the letter."

It was Molly's first letter—the only letter, perhaps, that she will ever write in all her life. Certainly she had never written one before, nor has she ever written one since. Like most housewives, her writing is only wanted for household accounts, recipes for puddings and pies and the labeling of her bottles and jars. I have the letter before me at this moment. It is written in a large, sprawling hand, and the spelling is not such as would satisfy my father.
Naturally she looked to me for advice. I had written many letters to my owners and to foreign merchants about cargoes, and the like, and was therefore able to advise the composition of a letter which should be justly expressed and to the point:
"Honored Lord—This is from me at the present moment in my guardian's parlor—writing parlor when I am at the ship should have written port or harbor. 'It is to inform you that intelligence has been brought by letters from London and Cambridge. Touching the matters referred to in these letters, I have to report for your satisfaction that they call your lordship in round terms a gambler and a ruined rake and your companions at the sparrows, Sam Semple, the parson, the rickety old bean and the colonel—simple rogues, common cheats and sharpers. Shall not, therefore, meet your lordship at the church tomorrow morning as instructed. Awaiting your lordship's explanations and commands, your most obedient, humble servant."
"MOLLY."
This letter I folded, sealed, addressed and dropped into my pocket. Then I bade Molly good night, entreated her to be thankful for her escape and so left her with a light heart. Verily it seemed as if the sadness of the last two months had been wholly and suddenly lifted, and on my way back to the Crown I passed the Lady Anastasia's lodging just as her chair was brought to the house. I opened the door for her and stood hat in hand.
"Why, it is Jack!" she cried. "It is the sailor Jack, the constant lover. Have you anything more to tell me?"
"Only that Molly will not keep that appointment of tomorrow evening."
"Oh, that interesting appointment in St. Nicholas' church. May a body ask why the ceremony has been postponed?"
"Things have been disclosed at the last moment, fortunately in time."
"What things, and by whom?"
"By letter. It is stated as a fact well known that Lord Fyngdale is nothing better than a ruined rake and a notorious gambler."
"Indeed! The excellent Lord Fyngdale! Impossible! Quite impossible! The illustrious example of so many virtues! The explanations will be, I am sure, complete and satisfactory. Ruined; a rake; a notorious gambler! What next will the world say? Does his lordship know of this discovery? Not yet? You said it was a discovery, did you not? Well, my friend, I am much obliged to you for telling me. You are quite sure Molly will not be there? Very good of you to tell me. For my own part I start for London quite early—at 5 o'clock. Goodbye, Jack!"
Then I went into the Crown, where I learned that the captain had been reading another letter containing accusations as bad as those in the other two.
So we fell to talking over the bus-

ness, and it was resolved that the captain should demand explanations by letter, that he should refuse to receive the villain Sam Semple or his lordship and that the vicar should, if necessary, proceed to London and there learn what he could concerning the past history and the present reputation of the noble suitor. Meantime I said no more about the intended marriage at St. Nicholas' church and the abandonment of the plan. As things turned out, it would have been far better had I told the captain and had we both planted ourselves as sentinels at the door, so as to be quite sure that Molly did not go forth at 6 in the morning.
That evening, after leaving me, Lady Anastasia sent a note to Lord Fyngdale. "I am leaving Lynn early tomorrow morning. I expect to be in London in two days. Shall write to Molly."

wedded wife," and so on, according to the form prescribed, and again the words beginning:
"With this ring I thee wed"—
I stood and listened, lost in wonder. Then came the prayer prescribed, after which the clergyman joined their hands together, saying:
"Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder."
I heard no more. I sat down on the nearest bench. What was the meaning of this sudden change? Remember that I had left Molly only a few hours before this fully resolved that she would demand an inquiry into the statements and charges made in the two letters—resolved that she would not keep the engagement, her admiration for the proud, brave, noble creature, her lover, turned into loathing.
And now, now, in the early morning, with her letter in my pocket stating her change of purpose, I found her at the altar and actually married.
"Whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder."
What if the man Purden was all that he was described? The priestly office confers rights and powers which are independent of the man who holds that office. Whatever his private wickedness, Purden was a clergyman, and therefore he could marry people.
Molly stood before the altar, as had been arranged. She wore a black silk domino; she had on a pink silk cloak with a hood drawn over her head, so that she was quite covered up and concealed. But I knew her by her stature, which was taller than the common, and by her dress, which had been agreed upon.
Then the bridegroom offered his hand and led the bride into the vestry. They were to sign the marriage register.
And here I rose and slunk away. I say that I slunk away, for you like it better, I crawled away. If I was sick at heart. The thing which I most dreaded, the marriage of our girl to a rake and a gambler, had been actually accomplished. Misery and ruin would be her lot. And in my pocket

CHAPTER XIV
A WEDDING.
HAD rowed myself aboard that evening in a strange condition of exultation, for I had no doubt—no doubt at all—that the charges were true and that a conspiracy of the most deadly kind was not only discovered, but also checked, and I could not but admire the craft and subtlety with which the favorite of the muses had devised a plan by which it was made possible for the conspirators to come all together without the least suspicion to the town of Lynn.
Nobody could stand against him, nor could any one in Lord Fyngdale's rank visit the town in its ordinary condition without receiving an invitation to Houghton if Sir Robert was there unless, indeed, there were reasons why he should not be visited or received. What Sam had not expected was without doubt the wonderful success of his deception, the eagerness with which the country round accepted his inventions, the readiness with which they drank these innocent waters, the miraculous cures effected and the transformation of the venerable old port and trading town into a haunt and resort of fashion and the pursuit of pleasure.
Thinking of all these things and in blissful anticipation of the discomfiture of all the conspirators, there was an important thing that I quite forgot—namely, to send Molly's letter to her suitor in his room at the Crown. I carried the letter in my pocket. I undressed and lay down in my bunk. I slept with a light heart, dreaming only of things pleasant until the morning, when the earliest stroke of the hammer from the yard and the quay woke me up. It was then 5:30. I sat up. I rubbed my eyes. I then suddenly remembered that the letter was in my pocket still.
It was, I say, 5:30. The engagement was for 6 o'clock. I might have to run yet to stop Lord Fyngdale.
It does not take long to dress. You may imagine that I did not spend time in powdering my hair. In a quarter of an hour I was over the side of the ship and in my dingy.
By the clock in the Common Stair it was five minutes to 6 when I landed and made her fast. I climbed the stairs and ran as fast as my legs could carry me to the Crown inn. As I reached the door the clock struck 6. Was Lord Fyngdale in his room? It was too late. He had left the house only five minutes before and had been carried in his chair across the market place.
I followed. It was already five minutes past the hour. I should find him in the church chafing at the delay. I should give him the letter and retire.
The market place was filled with the market people and with the townspeople who came to buy. I pushed across, stepping over a basket and jostled by a woman with poultry and vegetables. It was seven or eight minutes after 6 when I arrived at the church. The doors of the south porch were open. Within I heard the sound of voices or at least of one voice. I looked in.
Heavens! What had happened? Not only was I late with my letter, but—could I believe my eyes? Molly herself stood before the altar. Facing her was Lord Fyngdale, who held her hand. Within the rails stood the Rev. Benjamin Purden, beside him the clerk to make the responses, and the minister, when I arrived, was actually saying the words which the bridegroom repeats after the minister, completing in effect the marriage ceremony.
"I. Ludovic, take thee, Mary, to be

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was her letter asking for explanation—and withdrawing her promise for tomorrow. Could one believe one's sense?
I crawled away, ashamed for the first time in my life of the girl I loved. "Women, I said to myself, are poor, weak creatures. They believe everything. Lord Fyngdale must have been with her early. He had but to deny the whole; she accepted the denial. Despite her resolution she walked with him to the church as the lamb goes to the shambles. Oh, Molly! Who could have believed it of you?"
I left the church and went away. I thought of going to the captain; of telling my father; of telling the vicar, but it seemed like treachery, and I refrained.
Instead, I walked back to the quay and paddled to the ship, where presently the barges came alongside and the day's work began. Fortunately it is for a man that at moments of great unhappiness his work has to be done and he is desirous to put aside his sorrow and to think upon his duty. But—alas! Poor Molly! Who could have believed it possible?
Well, you see, I did not follow this wedding to an end. Had I gone into the vestry I should have been witness of something very unexpected.
The clergyman had the registers lying on the table open. He took a pen and filled in the forms. He then advanced the pen to the bride.
"My lady," he said, "I must ask your ladyship to sign the register—in duplicate, if you please."
The bride sat down and in a minute

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"My lady," he said, "I must ask your ladyship to sign the register—in duplicate, if you please."
The bride sat down and in a minute

was her letter asking for explanation—and withdrawing her promise for tomorrow. Could one believe one's sense?
I crawled away, ashamed for the first time in my life of the girl I loved. "Women, I said to myself, are poor, weak creatures. They believe everything. Lord Fyngdale must have been with her early. He had but to deny the whole; she accepted the denial. Despite her resolution she walked with him to the church as the lamb goes to the shambles. Oh, Molly! Who could have believed it of you?"
I left the church and went away. I thought of going to the captain; of telling my father; of telling the vicar, but it seemed like treachery, and I refrained.
Instead, I walked back to the quay and paddled to the ship, where presently the barges came alongside and the day's work began. Fortunately it is for a man that at moments of great unhappiness his work has to be done and he is desirous to put aside his sorrow and to think upon his duty. But—alas! Poor Molly! Who could have believed it possible?
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Cost of Ad-
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Commission
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23.85 2.80 26.65
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Treasurer.
INSURANCE
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