

**The
Lady from Long Acre**

By
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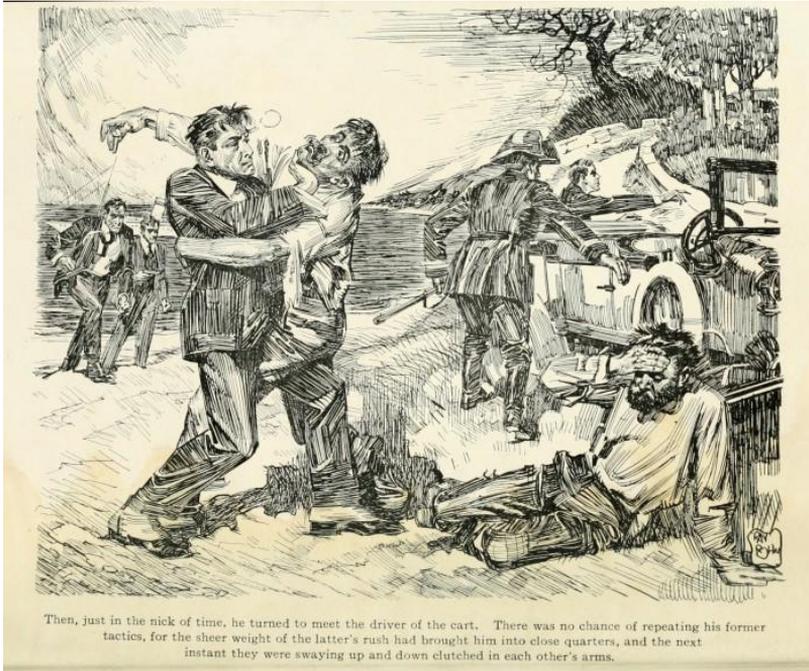
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The Lady from Long Acre



Then, just in the nick of time, he turned to meet the driver of the cart. There was no chance of repeating his former tactics, for the sheer weight of the latter's rush had brought him into close quarters, and the next instant they were swaying up and down clutched in each other's arms.

CHAPTER I

"TIGER" BUGG VERSUS "LIGHTNING" LOPEZ

Lady Jocelyn sighed gently and put down her cup on the tea-table.

"I suppose, Tony," she said, "that when one gets to seventy-two, one's conscience begins to decay just as one's body does. I seem to like good people less and immoral and useless ones more. You are the only member of the family it gives me the faintest pleasure to see nowadays."

Sir Antony Raymond Fulk Desmoleyn Conway—Conway Bart., more commonly known as Tony, nodded his head.

"They are rather a stuffy lot the others, aren't they!" he answered cheerfully. "Who's been round to see you?"

"Only Laura and Henry as yet." Lady Jocelyn spoke with some thankfulness.

"Well, that's enough," observed Tony. "Ten minutes with either of them always makes me feel I want to do something improper."

"Allowing for age and infirmity," said Lady Jocelyn, "they have a rather similar effect on me."

Tony laughed. "So you have heard all about my misdeeds?"

"I would hardly go as far as that. They were only here for two hours. You may smoke you know, Tony, if you want to."

He lighted a cigarette. "Tell me, Aunt Fanny," he pleaded. "There is no pleasure in blackening the family name unless one hears what the family says about it."

"The family," remarked Lady Jocelyn, "has a good deal to say about it. They consider that not only are you wasting your own life in the most deplorable manner, but that your methods of amusing yourself are calculated to bring a certain amount of discredit upon your more distinguished relatives. Henry attributes it chiefly to the demoralizing effect of wealth; Laura thinks that you were born with naturally low tastes."

"They're both right," observed Tony placidly. "I am what Guy calls 'a menace to my order.' That's a jolly way for one's secretary to talk to one, isn't it?"

"It's the only way dear Guy can talk, and after all I daresay he is telling the truth."

"I am sure he is," said Tony. "Guy is quite incapable of telling anything else." He paused. "Was Henry referring to any recent atrocity?"

"I think your choice of friends is what distresses him chiefly. He said that your more intimate acquaintances appear to consist of prize-fighters and chauffeurs."

Tony laughed good-humouredly. "I do a bit of motor racing, you know. I suppose that's what he meant by chauffeurs. As for prize-fighters—well, somebody must have been telling him about Bugg."

"About what?" inquired Lady Jocelyn mildly.

"Bugg," repeated Tony. "'Tiger' Bugg. He's a youthful protégé of mine—a boxer. In about three years, when he's grown a bit, he'll be champion of England."

Lady Jocelyn's good-humoured face wrinkled up into a whimsical smile.

"Dear Tony," she said. "Your conversation is always so stimulating. Tell me some more about Mr. Tiger Bugg. What a name! It sounds like some kind of American butterfly."

"Oh, he spells it with two g's," said Tony. "It's a very good name in the East End of London. There have been Buggs in Whitechapel for generations."

"So I have always understood," replied Lady Jocelyn. "How did you come across this particular branch of the family?"

"It was at a boxing club off the Stepney High Street. It's a blackguard sort of place run by a Jew named Isaacs. He gets in the East End street boys, and they fight each other for nothing in the hope that some boxing promoter will see them and give them a chance. Well, one night when I was there they put up this boy Bugg against a fellow who was big enough to eat him—a chap who knew something about the game, too. Bugg was hammered nearly silly in the first round, but he came up for the second and popped in a left hook bang on the point that put the big chap to sleep for almost ten minutes. It was one of the prettiest things I've ever seen."

"It sounds delightful," said Lady Jocelyn. "Go on, Tony."

"I was so pleased with his pluck," pursued the baronet tranquilly, "that I sent for him after the show and took him out to

have some supper. I thought he was precious hungry from the way he wolfed his food, and when I asked him I found he'd had nothing to eat all day except a bit of dry bread for breakfast. In addition to that he had tramped about ten miles looking for a job. Hardly what one would call a good preparation for fighting a fellow twice your size."

"It seems a most deserving case," remarked Lady Jocelyn sympathetically.

"That's what I thought," said Tony. "I had him up to Hampstead the next day and I gave him a good try out with the gloves. I saw at once that I'd got hold of something quite out of the common. He didn't know much about the science of the game, but he was just a born boxer—one of those boys who take to fighting as naturally as they do to breathing. He seemed a decent lad too in his way—a bit rough, of course, but then you couldn't expect anything else. Anyhow the end of it was I took him on, and he has been with me ever since."

"How nice!" said Lady Jocelyn. "And in what capacity does he figure in the household returns?"

Tony indulged in a smile. "I always call him my assistant secretary," he said, "just to fetch old Guy. As a matter of fact Bugg is a most useful chap. There's hardly anything he can't do. When he isn't training for a fight, we use him as a sort of maid-of-all-work."

"Oh, he still fights then?"

"Rather," said Tony. "He has never been beaten yet. Backing Bugg is my only source of income apart from the estate. I made twelve hundred pounds out of him last year."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Lady Jocelyn. "I had no idea you had a regular profession like that, Tony. What sort of people does he fight with?"

"We are open to meet any one in the world up to ten stone seven. In fact there are only about four who really matter that he hasn't met. There will be one less after to-morrow."

"What happens to-morrow?"

"Bugg is going to fight 'Lightning Lopez' at the Cosmopolitan."

"What beautiful names all these people seem to have," said Lady Jocelyn. "Who is 'Lightning Lopez'?"

"He calls himself the champion welter-weight of Europe," replied Tony a little contemptuously. "He's half an American and half a Livadian. That's why Pedro has taken him up."

"Pedro?" repeated Lady Jocelyn. "Do you mean King Pedro?"

Tony nodded. "Yes, Lopez is being backed by royalty or rather ex-royalty. We hope to have five hundred of the best out of His Majesty by to-morrow night."

"Are you a friend of Pedro's?" asked Lady Jocelyn.

"Oh, hardly that," said Tony. "He belongs to the Cosmo, you know, and I often meet him at races and first nights."

Lady Jocelyn paused for a moment.

"I remember him very well as a little boy at Portriga before the revolution," she said. "What has he grown up like?"

"Well," observed Tony, thoughtfully brushing some cigarette ash from his sleeve, "he's short and fat and dark and rather spotty, and he drinks too much."

Lady Jocelyn nodded. "Ah!" she said, "just like his poor father. Has he inherited the family weakness for female society?"

"He's a bit of a rip," said Tony. "Or rather he was. Molly Monk of the Gaiety has got hold of him now, and I think she keeps him pretty straight. She's not the sort to stand any nonsense, you know."

"I will take your word for it, Tony," said Lady Jocelyn gravely.

Tony laughed. "Well, you can, Aunt Fanny," he returned. "I've known Molly since she was a little flapper. She is the granddaughter of old Monk who used to look after the lodge at Holbeck."

Lady Jocelyn raised her eyebrows. "Dear me!" she exclaimed. "Is that so, Tony! Why I remember the old man perfectly. She must be a clever girl to have got on like she has. What a pity she couldn't be content with her profession."

"Oh, Molly's all right," said Tony carelessly. "She's straight enough as girls of that sort go. You can be quite sure she's really fond of Pedro or she wouldn't have anything to do with him."

"He didn't sound exactly lovable from your description of him," remarked Lady Jocelyn.

"Well, perhaps I didn't do him justice. He isn't such a bad fellow in his way, you know. He drinks too much and he's stupid and spoilt, but he's quite good-natured and amiable with it. I have

no doubt Molly can twist him round her finger; and I suppose there's a certain attraction in having a king trotting around after you—even if he is out of a job. No doubt it annoys the other girls."

"As a bachelor, my dear boy," said Lady Jocelyn, "you have no right to be so well acquainted with feminine weaknesses." She paused. "You know you really ought to get married, Tony," she added, "if only to circulate your income."

Tony laughed. "You have hit on my one strong point as a capitalist," he said. "You ask Guy, Aunt Fanny!"

"But you can't spend forty thousand a year by yourself—surely?"

"Oh, I get a little help now and then. I don't know that I really want it though. It's wonderful what one can do with practice and a steam yacht."

"It's not nearly as wonderful as what you could do with a wife," said Lady Jocelyn. "Anyhow you ought to get married if only to please me. I shall soon be too old for travelling about, and then I shall want some really naughty children to give me an interest in life. I shall never be interested in Henry's twins: they are such dreadful little prigs."

Tony got up from his chair and taking the old lady's slender, much beringed hand raised it to his lips.

"If you feel like that, Aunt Fanny," he said, "I shall certainly have to think about it. You won't mind who she is, I suppose?"

"I only make two stipulations," said Lady Jocelyn. "She mustn't be a German and she mustn't wear squeaky boots."

Tony laughed. "All right, Aunt Fanny," he said. "I can promise you that safely."

He walked to the window and glanced down into Chester Square where a huge venomous-looking, two-seated Peugeot was filling up the roadway.

"I must toddle away now," he observed. "I want to run up to the Club, and see that everything's all right for to-morrow night, and then I must get back home and change. I have promised to go to this fancy dress dance at the Albert Hall, and it will take me a long time to look like Charles the Second."

Lady Jocelyn leaned forward and rang the bell. "Come and see me again some day, Tony," she said, "when you have nothing better to do. I shall be home till the end of July, at all events."

Tony bent down and kissed her affectionately. "I shall often be dropping in if I may," he said. "I am always in scrapes you know, Aunt Fanny, and you are about the only person I can look to for a little sympathy and encouragement."

"If my moral support is of any use, Tony," she said, "you can count on it to the utmost."

Outside the house a small crowd of loafers and errand boys had gathered round the car, which with its enormous strapped bonnet and disk wheels looked singularly out of place in this trim, respectable neighbourhood.

"Wotyer call that, guv'nor?" inquired one of them. "A cycle car?"

"It's the new Baby Peugeot," replied Tony gravely.

He started up the engine, and climbing into the seat, disappeared round the corner, followed by the admiring glances of his audience.

The Cosmopolitan Club, the headquarters of British pugilism, is situated in Covent Garden. It is regarded by some excellent people as a plague spot that will eventually be wiped away by the rising flood of a more humanized civilization, but this opinion can hardly be said to represent the views of the porter and carmen who frequent the vicinity. To them the Club represents all that is best and brightest in English civilization, and amongst its numerous and oddly assorted members nobody could claim to be better known or more popular than Tony.

As the big car picked its way over the cobbles, twisting neatly in and out between unattended carts and piles of empty baskets, a good number of the men who were lounging about greeted the owner with a friendly salute. When he reached the Club and pulled up, several of them stepped forward eagerly to open the door.

"Ow abaht ter-morrer, sir," inquired one huge, hoarse-voiced carter. "Sife to shove a bit on Tiger?"

"You can shove your horse and cart on him," said Tony, "and if it doesn't come off I'll buy you another."

He jumped out and crossed the pavement, followed by an approving murmur from everyone who had heard his offer.

The carter spat decisively into the gutter. "E's a ruddy nobleman, 'e is," he observed, looking round the group with a bloodshot eye. "'Oo says 'e ain't?"

No one ventured on such a rash assertion; indeed, putting aside the carter's discouraging air, everyone present considered Tony's offer to be the very acme of aristocratic behaviour.

The creator of this favourable impression pushed open the swinging door of the Club and, accepting a couple of letters from the hotel porter, walked through into the comfortably furnished bar lounge at the back. Its two inhabitants, who were each in the act of consuming a cocktail, glanced round at his entrance. One was "Doggy" Donaldson, the manager, a burly, genial-looking, bullet-headed individual with close-cropped grey hair, and a permanently unlit cigar jutting up rakishly out of the corner of his mouth.

"Hello, Tony," he exclaimed. "You're just in time to join us. You know the Marquis da Freitas, of course?"

Tony nodded easily, and Donaldson's companion, a stout, dark-complexioned, well-dressed man of about fifty with a certain air of distinction about him, returned the greeting with a courteous wave of his hand.

"We meet as enemies, Sir Antony," he remarked smilingly.

"Well, I just dropped in for a second to see that everything was all right about to-morrow," said Tony. "Our boy is in fine form: never been fitter. I hope you have been equally lucky?"

The Marquis indulged in the faintest possible shrug of his broad shoulders. "I believe so," he said. "I am not a great authority on these matters myself, but they amuse His Majesty."

"Everything's O.K.," observed the manager in a satisfied voice. "We sold the last seat this morning, and there have been several

applications since. It's going to be the best night of the season. You will see your boy turns up in good time, won't you?"

Tony helped himself to the cocktail, which the barman, without asking any superfluous questions, had been quietly preparing for him.

"Right you are," he said, drinking it off. "What's the betting, Doggy?"

"Martin-Smith told me this morning he'd got a level hundred on Lopez."

Tony put down the empty glass. "Ah well," he said, "he can afford to lose it."

There was a short pause.

"You seem confident, Sir Antony," remarked the Marquis in his suave voice. "Perhaps you would like to back your opinion a little further. I don't know much about this sort of thing, as I said just now, but I am prepared to support our man if only from patriotic motives."

"Anything you care to suggest, Marquis," said Tony indifferently.

"Shall we say a couple of hundred, then?"

Tony nodded, and booked the bet on his shirt cuff.

"I must be off now," he said. "I suppose you and the King will be at the Albert Hall to-night?"

The Marquis shook his head. "I do not think His Majesty intends to be present. As for me—" he again shrugged his shoulders—"I grow old for such frivolities."

"Well, till to-morrow then," said Tony.

He passed out again through the hall, and jumping into the car steered his way slowly round the corner into Long Acre, where he branched off in the direction of Piccadilly. He was just passing Garnett's, the celebrated theatrical costumier, when the door of that eminent establishment swung open, and a very pretty and smartly dressed girl stepped out on to the pavement. Directly Tony saw her he checked the car and turned it gently in towards the gutter.

She came up to him with a most attractive smile.

"But how convenient, Tony," she exclaimed. "You will be able to drive me home. I was just going to waste my money on a taxi."

He leaned across and opened the door. "You can give me the bob instead, Molly," he said. "Jump in."

She stepped up alongside of him, and with a harsh croak the big car glided forward again into the thronging bustle of Leicester Square.

"Funny picking you up like this," he said. "I've just been talking about you."

"I'm always being talked about," replied Molly serenely. "I hope you weren't as nasty as most people."

"I was saying that you were the only girl in London with that particular shade of red hair." Tony brought out this shameless untruth with the utmost coolness.

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