



## A Lady for Lord Randall (Brides of Waterloo)

By Sarah Mallory

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...can true love survive?

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### Editorial Review

#### About the Author

Sarah Mallory lives in an old farmhouse on the edge of the Yorkshire Pennines and writes historical romantic adventures. She has had over 20 books published and her Harlequin Historicals have won the RoNA Rose Award in 2012 and 2013. Sarah loves to hear from readers! Contact her via her website at: [www.sarahmallory.com](http://www.sarahmallory.com)

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Randall glanced at the clock. Had it only been an hour since they had arrived at the Bentincks'? It felt longer. He was not naturally sociable, preferring the company of a few close friends to parties such as this where the room was crowded with strangers, but he knew he must try to make himself agreeable, for his sister Hattie's sake. The Bentincks were a cheerful couple whose children had flown the nest and who now liked to fill their time and their house with interesting young people. The problem was, their idea of interesting was not Randall's. Hattie had explained that the Bentincks' house would be full of intellectuals, artists and atheists.

'And tradesmen, too, no doubt,' he had retorted.

'They are invited because of their intelligence, not their rank,' she told him and gave a little trill of laughter when Randall grimaced at the idea. 'You must come, they will be quite delighted to have an earl, a real live peer of the realm in their midst. And a soldier, to boot.'

'And does the Bishop approve of you and Graveney attending these parties?' he had asked her, thinking of her husband, the rural dean.

Hattie's eyes had twinkled merrily at that.

'Not at all, but Theo loves to go there, he approaches these evenings with all the zeal of a missionary. As he says, what is the point of always preaching to the converted?'

Observing his brother-in-law across the Bentincks' drawing room, Randall could well believe it. Theo Graveney was involved in a lively discussion with a group of gentlemen in loose coats and untidy hair. Arms were flying and voices were raised as the debate grew ever more heated.

Randall's gaze moved on. Most of the guests were writers or scholars, he guessed, his eyes dwelling on one or two shabbily dressed men with ink stains on their fingers. There were no military men present, save himself, the rest of the party being made up of tradesmen, artists and even a couple of French *émigrés*. They were all gathered in little groups, engaged in animated conversation. There was a smattering of women amongst the crowd, some of them pretty, in a blowsy sort of way, and all giving their opinions as decidedly as the men.

Randall disliked such loud, overbearing society and he had retreated as soon as he could to a quiet corner. He had known how it would be and he should have remained at Somervil. Oh, Mrs Bentinck had greeted him warmly enough, but her first comment had warned him just what to expect from the evening:

'We are very informal here, my lord, and stand on no ceremony. I shall make no introductions, you must take your chances like the rest of the guests.'

She had carried Hattie away then, leaving Randall to mingle as he wished. But Randall did not wish. With Bonaparte even now marching through France and the country on the verge of war again, he was not to be distracted with idle conversation. His sister came up and handed him a glass of wine.

'Well, Randall, what do you think of our little gathering?'

'*Little* gathering, Hattie? Such a number would be considered a crush even in the Latymor town house.'

'They travel from far and wide to attend the Bentincks' soirées,' she said proudly.

'That may be so, but it is not to my taste,' muttered Randall. 'I am a soldier, plain and simple.' A shout from the far corner caught their attention and he glanced to where a group of young men were now arguing noisily. 'I have no patience with artistic tantrums.'

'Pray do not be tiresome, Justin, there are more than just artists here, and plenty to entertain, if you are not too high in the instep.' Hattie patted his arm, murmuring as she prepared to move away, 'You should relax and enjoy yourself, dear brother. You are a man of the world, so I trust you not be shocked by the company we keep.'

Randall knew he could not stay in one spot all evening and he began to stroll around the room, listening to the conversations, but joining in with very few of them. He had not worn his uniform, but began to think he would have been more at home if he had done so. At least then it would have been plain what his role was and he would not have been asked for his opinion on so-and-so's latest stanzas, or if he had read some new and profound religious tract. He was wondering how soon he could possibly retire without giving offence when a soft, musical voice sounded at his elbow.

'You look a little lost, sir.'

He turned, vexed to find himself addressed by a woman he did not know. But he should not be surprised at such brazen behaviour, given the company gathered here tonight. He could not recall seeing her before amongst the crowd, for there was certainly nothing blowsy about her. She was neatly dressed in a gown of cream muslin with her dark hair swept up on her head, unrelieved by ribbons or flowers. She carried herself with an assurance that seemed odd in one so young—she looked about two-and-twenty, the same age as his sister Sarah. The woman was regarding him with a humorous twinkle in her green eyes and he found himself wanting to respond with a smile. Impossible, of course. One did not encourage such persons. Still, he replied more politely than he was wont to do.

'Not lost. Merely daydreaming.'

'I have not seen you here before. I am Mary Endacott, I am presently staying here. Mrs Bentinck is my cousin.'

She waited, clearly expecting him to introduce himself.

'I'm Randall,' he said shortly, rather taken aback by such forwardness.

Her brows went up. 'The earl, Harriett's brother?' 'You are surprised, ma'am?'

His cold tone should have depressed any pretension, but Mary Endacott merely laughed at him.

'Well, yes, I am. I would not have seen this as your normal milieu. The company is a little...radical.'

'I arrived at short notice today.'

'Ah, so you had no choice but to attend.'

He said carefully, 'I am very happy to be here.'

'But you would rather not socialise with us. I have been watching you, my lord, and you do not look to be enjoying yourself.'

'That is because my mind is occupied elsewhere.'

'On the forthcoming confrontation with Napoleon, perhaps?'

'Amongst other things.'

She nodded. 'It does seem rather frivolous to be discussing art and philosophy when the fate of Europe hangs in the balance.'

'Just so.' He glanced at her fingers, which were holding her closed fan. The right hand was folded over the left so he could not see any ring, but she had such poise and confidence that he guessed she was a married woman. He glanced about the room. 'Which of these gentlemen is your husband?'

'Oh, I am not married.' She chuckled. 'Actually, that applies to a number of the women here tonight, but in my case I am not in a *union* with anyone, either. Many here are opposed to the concept of marriage,' she explained. 'No church ceremony can bind a man and woman together, only love can do that. Love, and a commonality of intellectual interests, of course.'

Her eyes were fixed on his face and he had the impression she was trying to shock him.

'And is that your conviction, too?'

He had the satisfaction of seeing that his blunt question had discomposed her, but then he was a little sorry when she looked away from him.

'It is what I was brought up to believe.'

He said, 'It would require a great deal of trust on the woman's part, I think, to enter into such a union without the blessing of the church. She would not have the protection of the man's name.'

'She would not become his property, either. The current law is a scandalous state of affairs and has serious disadvantages for a woman.'

He inclined his head.

'Very true, Miss Endacott.'

A female of decided opinions. Not his type at all.

'Ah, Mary, so you have met my brother.'

He had not seen Harriett come up, but now she linked arms with Miss Endacott.

'We introduced ourselves,' he said shortly.

'I would not have thought that necessary,' said Harriett. 'Did you not recognise the nose, Mary? All the Latymors have it, and any number of villagers, too, thanks to Papa. At home one could never walk through Chalfont Magna without encountering at least two of his by-blows. Oh, there is no need for you to look daggers at me, Randall, Mary knows all about our father's dissolute ways. We are very old friends, you see. We were at Miss Burchell's Academy together.'

He relaxed, just a little. So the forward Miss Endacott was one of Harriett's free-thinking school friends.

'That explains a great deal,' he murmured.

Harriett's eyes twinkled. 'Has Mary outraged you with her radical ideas? Her parents were great admirers of Mrs Godwin—Mary Wollstonecraft—hence her name.'

Miss Endacott chuckled, a soft, warm sound that was very pleasing to the ear.

'I certainly tried to be outrageous, Hattie, but your brother would not rise to the bait.'

'Well, you know he is a soldier, and commands a company of rogues, so he is most likely unshockable.'

With two pairs of eyes fixed upon him, two laughing faces turned up to his, Randall felt ill at ease. He gave a little nod and left them. By God, he would prefer to face a charge by French cavalry than these teasing women! He passed Theo, who was at the centre of a group of clerics and rather surprisingly arguing for Catholic emancipation, and moved on to a group of young men who were discussing the Lake poets, but he was thankful when Mr Bentinck came up and carried him away.

'You do not look to be enjoying yourself, my lord.'

'I confess I have little in common with your guests,' replied Randall carefully 'I came to please my sister.'

'Ah, yes. Mrs Graveney.' His host nodded. 'She may prefer not to be known as Lady Harriett these days but she is very proud of *you*, you know. She likes the fact that you followed your grandfather into the artillery rather than buying a commission. Well, sir, there are fellows over here whose conversation might be more to your taste.'

Bentinck took him across to a cluster of tradesmen who were eager for news of Bonaparte. Randall stayed for a while, discussing the latest situation and how it might affect their business, before moving on.

The good dinner his sister had provided at Somervil, plus the Bentincks' excellent wines, were having an effect. Randall felt more relaxed, more able to participate in the conversations, but even as he did so, he found his eyes straying to Mary Endacott as she moved around the room. Her figure was very good and she had a natural grace. He liked the way the swing of her hips set the thin skirts of her muslin gown fluttering in the most alluring fashion as she walked. When she passed close to him he stepped away from the group he was with to talk to her.

'You are not enamoured of any of the discussions, Miss Endacott?'

'On the contrary, I find them all fascinating, but a heated debate on theology with Mr Graveney has left me sadly thirsty.'

Allow me.' He accompanied her to the table at the side of the room, where an array of jugs and decanters were set out. He filled two wine glasses and held one out to her.

'Thank you,' she said. 'I am sure you are more used to raising a finger and having a servant wait upon you.'

'Trying to put me to the blush, Miss Endacott? You will not succeed.' He followed her to a vacant sofa and sat down beside her. 'I am a soldier and accustomed to much rougher conditions than these.'

She laughed.

'Of course you are. Hattie has told me all about Randall's Rogues, the raff and scuff of the military gathered into one troop. Men it is impossible to place elsewhere. If you had not taken them most would have been hanged by now.' She sipped at the wine. 'I do not approve of war, but your efforts in this case are admirable; you have turned them into a formidable unit. From the despatches I read in the newspapers they acquitted themselves well in the Peninsula.'

'They are all good artillerymen.'

'Perhaps they have a good colonel.'

Randall shrugged.

'I demand only two things, Miss Endacott, unquestioning obedience and loyalty.' She shook her head at him.

'Loyalty I can understand, but unquestioning obedience? I do not think I could give anyone that.' She gave a little shrug and smiled at him. 'Nevertheless, I have to congratulate you on your success, sir. To take such unpromising material and turn them into a crack artillery troop is no mean feat.'

'A man's background is nothing to me, as long as he can fight.'

'But how does one control such men?' she asked him. 'Iron discipline. The lash and the rope. When a man joins the Rogues he knows it is his last chance.' He saw the disapproval in her eyes.

'That is a brutal way to go on, my lord.'

'It is necessary. In war a man must know he can rely on his comrades.'

'I would there were no wars and no need for armies.'

'That is a dream of all reasonable beings, madam.'

He leaned back, watching the changing emotions flicker across her countenance.

She said a little wistfully, 'My father was a great supporter of the revolution in France, and of Bonaparte, at

first. Papa thought he would uphold democracy, until he proclaimed himself emperor and began to overrun Europe.'

'Thus, until the world is at peace we shall always need soldiers, Miss Endacott.'

'We shall indeed. But this is dismal talk, Lord Randall, surely there must be a more entertaining topic?'

'Yes, you,' he said, surprising himself, but it was worth it to see the becoming blush spread over her cheeks.

'No, no, I am not entertaining at all.'

'Will you not let me be the judge of that?' She shook her head and looked as if she might leave him, so he said quickly, 'Very well, what would you like to discuss? Let us agree that I shall allow you to choose the first topic for discussion. You must then allow me my choice.'

She leaned back against the arm of the sofa and regarded him, a faint smile playing at the edges of her mouth.

'Very well. I would like to know what persuaded the great Earl Randall to attend the party tonight.'

'That is simple: my sister asked me.'

'Even though you clearly do not approve of us?'

'Even so. I am only here for one week and did not wish to spend an evening apart from Harriett.'

'Hattie always said you were the best of the Latymors.' She observed his surprise and her smile grew. 'You must remember I have been Hattie's friend since our schooldays, Lord Randall. I am aware that your mother, the countess, was outraged when Harriett returned from school with her head full of independent ideas. Our intentions were very much the same, you see. We both wished to make our own way in the world and declared we would never marry. It must have been a relief when Hattie fell head over heels in love with Theophilus three years ago.'

'It was. Graveney had a comfortable independence and my mother was too relieved to see her daughter respectably married to protest at her new son-in-law's rather unconventional views.'

Randall was surprised that he should talk so freely. It was not his habit to discuss his family with anyone, but there was an elusive charm about this woman that put him at his ease.

'Quite...' she nodded '...and they have lived happily in Sussex ever since, unconcerned that Harriett's family disapprove of the match.'

'I do not disapprove,' said Randall mildly. 'For my part I have no objection to Graveney. He is a decade older than I am and we have little in common, but I like the fact that he has made no effort to ingratiate himself with the family and he is not afraid to speak his mind.'

'You do not object to that?' she asked, her brows raised.

'No, I respect it. And I am content that the fellow can support Harriett and make her happy.' He paused. 'Now



what have I said to make you smile?'

'Hattie told me you were very different from the rest of the Latymors.'

'Oh?' He stiffened. 'May I ask what she has said about our family?'

## **Users Review**

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