

The Roaring Girl

by Thomas Middleton and
Thomas Dekker (1611)

MOLL CUTPURSE: the Roaring Girl

LAXTON: a lewd

Laxton, captivated by Moll, a pipe-smoking, cross-dressing cutpurse, approaches her to serve as his whore in the back of a coach. She agrees, but arrives in man's attire, ready to fight him as a spokesperson for all women who have been treated as such.

Suggested weapons: short sword, rapier

London, Gray's Inn Fields.

LAXTON: Stay, 'tis now about the hour of her appointment, but yet I see her not. (*The clock strikes three.*) Hark what's this? One, two, three, three by the clock at Savoy; this is the hour, and Gray's Inn Fields the place, she swore she'd meet me: ha, yonder's two Inns o' Court men with one wench, but that's not she, they walk toward Islington out of my way: I see none yet dressed like her, I must look for a shag ruff, a frieze jerkin, a short sword, and a saveguard, or I get none: why Moll, prithee make haste, or the coachman will curse us anon.

(*Enter Moll like a man.*)

MOLL: (*Aside.*) Oh, here's my gentleman: if they would keep their days as well with their mercers as their hours with their harlots, no bankrupt would give seven score pound for a sergeant's place, for would you know a catchpoll rightly deriv'd, the corruption of a citizen is the generation of a sergeant! How his eye hawks for venery! — Come, are you ready, sir?

LAXTON: Ready? For what, sir?

MOLL: Do you ask that now, sir? Why was this meeting 'pointed?

LAXTON: I thought you mistook me, sir.

You seem to be some young barrister.

I have no suit in law; all my land's sold:

I praise heaven for't; 't has rid me of much trouble.

MOLL: Then I must wake you, sir. Where stands the coach?

LAXTON: Who's this? Moll? Honest Moll?

MOLL: So young and purblind? You're an old wanton in your eyes, I see that.

LAXTON: Th' art admirably suited for the Three Pigeons at

Brainford; I'll swear I knew thee not.

MOLL: I'll swear you did not, but you shall know me now.

LAXTON: No, not here, we shall be spied, i'faith; the coach is better, come.

MOLL: Stay.

LAXTON: What, wilt thou untruss a point, Moll?

(*She puts off her cloak and draws.*)

MOLL: Yes, here's the point that I untruss, it has but one tag; 'twill serve tho' to tie up a rogue's tongue.

LAXTON: How!

MOLL: There's the gold with which you hir'd your hackney.

(*Attacking him.*) Here's her pace;

She racks hard, and perhaps your bones will feel it!

Ten angels of mine own I've put to thine;

Win 'em and wear 'em!

LAXTON: Hold, Moll, Mistress Mary!

MOLL: Draw or I'll serve an execution on thee

Shall lay thee up till doomsday!

LAXTON: Draw upon a woman? Why, what dost mean, Moll?

MOLL: To teach thy base thoughts manners. Th' art one of those

That thinks each woman thy fond, flexible whore,

If she but cast a liberal eye upon thee;

Turn back her head, she's thine: or, amongst company,

By chance drink first to thee, then she's quite gone,

There's no means to help her; nay for a need,
Wilt swear unto thy credulous fellow lechers
That art more in favour with a lady
At first sight than her monkey all her lifetime.
There's no mercy in't. — What durst move you, sir,
To think me whorish?

I scorn to prostitute myself to a man,
I, that can prostitute a man to me:
And so I greet thee.

LAXTON: Hear me.

MOLL: Would the spirits
Of all my slanderers were clasp'd in thine,
That I might vex an army at one time.

LAXTON: I do repent me! Hold!

(They fight.)

MOLL: You'll die the better Christian then.

LAXTON: I do confess I have wrong'd thee, Moll.

MOLL: Confession is but poor amends for wrong,
Unless a rope would follow.

LAXTON: I ask thee pardon.

MOLL: I'm your hir'd whore, sir.

LAXTON: I yield both purse and body!

MOLL: Both are mine and now at my disposing.

LAXTON: Spare my life!

MOLL: I scorn to strike thee basely.

LAXTON: Spoke like a noble girl, i' faith! *(Aside.)* Heart, I think
I fight with a familiar or the ghost of a fencer! Sh' has
wounded me gallantly. Call you this a lecherous voyage?
Here's blood would have serv'd me this seven year in bro-
ken heads and cut fingers, and it now runs all out together.
Pox o' the Three Pigeons! I would the coach were here
now to carry me to the surgeon's.

(Exit Laxton.)

MOLL: If I could meet my enemies one by one thus,
I might make pretty shift with 'em in time,
And make 'em know, she that has wit and spirit

May scorn to live beholding to her body for meat,
Or for apparel like your common dame
That makes shame get her clothes to cover shame.
Base is that mind that kneels unto her body,
As if a husband stood in awe on's wife:
My spirit shall be mistress of this house
As long as I have time in't.

