

Thorne Guy

The Socialist



Guy Thorne
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CHAPTER I

CONCERNING HIS GRACE

THE DUKE OF PADDINGTON

There are as many social degrees in the peerage as there are in the middle and lower classes.

There are barons who are greater noblemen than earls, viscounts who are welcomed in a society that some marquises can never hope to enter – it is a question not of wealth or celebrity, but of family relationships and date of creation.

When, however, a man is a duke in England, his state is so lofty, he is so inevitably apart from every one else that these remarks hardly apply at all. Yet even in dukedoms one recognises there are degrees. There are royal dukes, stately figureheads moving in the brilliant light which pours from the throne, and generally a little obscured by its refulgence. These have their own serene place and being.

There are the political dukes, Cabinet-made, who are solemnly caricatured through two generations of *Punch*, massive, Olympian, and generally asleep on the front benches of the House of Lords.

And every now and then it happens that there are the young dukes.

The fathers of the young dukes have lived to a great age and married late in life. They have died when their sons were little children. For years it seems to the outside public as if certain historic houses are in abeyance. Nothing much is heard of these names, and only Londoners who pay enormous ground rents to this or that Ducal estate office realise what a long minority means.

From time to time paragraphs find their way into the society papers telling of the progress of this or that young dukeling at Eton. The paragraphs become more in evidence when the lad goes to Oxford, and then, like a suddenly-lit lamp, the prince attains his majority.

Paragraphs in weekly papers expand into columns in all the dailies. The public suddenly realises that the Duke of – , a young man of twenty-one, owns a great slice of London, has an income of from one to two hundred thousand pounds a year, and by the fact of his position is a force in public affairs. For a week every one talks about the darling of fortune. His pictures are in all the journals. His castle in Kent, his palace in Park Lane, his castle in Scotland, his villa at Monte Carlo, are, as it were, thrown open to the inspection of the world. The hereditary jewels are disinterred by popular rumour from the vaults at Coutts' Bank. The Mysore Nagar emerald that the third duke brought from India glitters once more in the fierce light of day. The famous diamond tiara that the second duke bought for his duchess (in the year when his horse "Strawberry Leaf" won the Derby and His Grace eighty thousand pounds) sparkles as never before. Photographers seek, and obtain, permission to visit the famous picture galleries at Duke Dale, and American millionaires gasp with envy as they read of the Velasquez, the three Murillos, the priceless series of Rembrandt genre pictures, and the "Prince in Sable" of Vandyck, owned by a youth who has in all probability never seen any one of them.

The man in the street has his passing throb of envy, and then, being a generous-minded fellow in the main, and deeply imbued with loyalty to all existing and splendid institutions, wishes his lordship luck and promptly forgets all about him.

What the man *on* the street – a very different sort of person – says, is merely a matter which polite people do not hear, for who heeds a few growls in cellars or curses in a cul-de-sac?

Women are even more generous, as is their dear mission to the world. If your dukeling is a pretty lad, presentable and straight as caught by the obsequious camera, they give him kind thoughts

and wonder who the fortunate girl will be. Who shall share the throne of Prince Fortunatus? On whose white and slender neck shall that great Indian emerald give out its sinful Asiatic fire? On whose shining coronet of hair shall rise that crown of diamonds that the brave horse won for the "bad old duke" on Epsom Downs?

And then all the stir and bother is over. Some newer thing engages the public mind. Another stone is thrown into another pool; the ripples upon the first die away, and the waters are tranquil once more.

Prince Fortunatus has ascended his throne, and the echoes of the ceremonial trumpets are over and gone.

* * * * *

John Augustus Basil FitzTracy was the fifth Duke of Paddington, Earl of Fakenham in Norfolk, and a baronet of the United Kingdom.

His seats were Fakenham Hall, at Fakenham, Castle Trink, N. B., and the old Welsh stronghold, near Conway, known as Carleon, which had come to him from his mother's aunt, old Lady Carleon of Lys.

In regard to his houses, there was, first and foremost, the great square pile in Piccadilly, which was almost as big as the Duke of Devonshire's palace, and was known as Paddington House. There was an old Saxon house near Chipping Norton, in Gloucestershire, which was used as a hunting-box – the late duke always having ridden with the Heythrop. There was also a big blue, pink-and-white villa upon the Promenade des Anglais at Nice – the late duke liked to spend February among the palms and roses of the Riviera, though it was said that the duchess never accompanied him upon these expeditions to the sun-lit shores of the Mediterranean.

The Duke of Paddington was not a great country nobleman. Fakenham was some three thousand acres, and though the shooting was excellent, as is the shooting of all the big houses which surround Sandringham Hall, the place in itself was not particularly noteworthy. Nor did the duke own coal mines, while no railways had enriched him by passing through any of his properties.

The duke's enormous revenues were drawn from London. He and their graces of Westminster and Bedford might well have contended for a new title – Duke of London. If extent of possessions and magnitude of fortune could alone decide such an issue the Duke of Paddington would have won.

A huge slice of the outer West End – anywhere north of Oxford Street – belonged to him.

His income was variously stated, but the only truth about it, upon which every one was agreed, was that it was incredibly large.

There was a certain modest, massive stone building in the Edgware Road where the duke's affairs were conducted. It was known as the FitzTracy Estate Office, forty clerks were regularly employed there, and only old Colonel Simpson, late of the Army Service Corps, and now chief agent to the duke, knew what the actual income was.

Possessor of all this, – and it is but the barest epitome, – the duke was twenty-three years of age, had no near relations, and was just finishing his university career at Oxford.

Everything that the human mind can wish for was his; there was hardly anything in the world, worthy or unworthy, that he could not have by asking for it.

The duke was an undergraduate of St. Paul's College, Oxford. Much smaller than Christ Church, Magdalen, or New College, St. Paul's is, nevertheless, the richest and most aristocratic foundation in the university. It was a preserve of the peerage; no poor men could afford to enter at Paul's, and it was even more difficult for the sons of rich vulgarians to do so.

On one dull, cold morning at the end of the October term the duke came out of his bedroom into the smaller of his two sitting rooms. It was about ten o'clock. He had cut both early chapel or

its alternative roll-call – necessities from which even dukes are not exempt if they wish to keep their terms.

The duke wore an old Norfolk jacket and a pair of grey flannel trousers. His feet were thrust into a pair of red leather bath slippers. He was about five feet ten in height, somewhat sturdily built, and deliberate in his movements. His head was thickly covered with very dark red hair. The eyes were grey, and with a certain calm and impassivity about them – the calm of one so highly placed that nothing can easily affect him; one sees it in the eyes of kings and queens. The nose was aquiline, and thin at the nostrils, the nose of an aristocrat; the mouth was large, and pleasant in expression, though by no means always genial. There was, in short, something Olympian about this young man, an air, a manner, an aroma of slight aloofness, a consciousness of his position. It was not aggressive or pronounced, but it was indubitably there.

In the majority of colleges at Oxford undergraduates have only two rooms. In Paul's, more particularly in what were known as the new buildings, men had three, a bedroom, a dining-room or small sitting-room, in which breakfast and lunch were taken, and a larger sitting-room.

The duke came out of his bedroom into the smaller room. It was panelled in white throughout. Let into the panels here and there were first impressions of famous coloured mezzotints by Raphael Smith, Valentine Green, and other masters. They had been brought from the portfolios at Paddington House, and each one was worth three hundred pounds.

The chairs of this room were upholstered in red leather – a true vermilion, and not the ordinary crimson – which went admirably with the white walls and the Persian carpet, brick-dust and peacock blue colour, from Teheran. A glowing fire of cedar logs sent a cheerful warmth into the room, and the flames were reflected in the china and silver of a small round table prepared for breakfast.

Although it was November, there was a great silver dish of fruit, nectarines, and strawberries, grapes and peaches, all produced in the new electric forcing houses which had been installed at the duke's place at Fakenham. There was no apparatus for tea or coffee. In some things the duke was a little unusual. He never drank tea or coffee, but took a glass of thin white wine from Valperga. The tall yellow bottle stood on the table now, and by its side was a fragile glass of gold and purple, blown in Venice three hundred years ago.

The duke crossed the room and the larger one that opened out of it. He pushed open the swing door – the heavy outer "oak" lay flat against the wall – and shouted down the staircase for his "scout."

Despite the ineradicable belief of some popular novelists, there are no bells at Oxford, and duke or commoner must summon his servant in the good old mediæval way.

In a minute the man appeared with breakfast. He had previously brought his master a printed list from the kitchens when he called him. Gardener was an elderly, grey-haired man, clean-shaven, and confidential of manner. He had served many young noblemen on staircase number one, and each and all had found him invaluable. He had feathered his nest well during the years, and was worth every penny of ten thousand pounds. A type produced nowhere in such completeness and perfection as at Oxford or Cambridge, he represented a certain definite social class, a class more hated by the working man than perhaps any other – the polite parasite!

"Beastly weather, Gardener," said the duke in a voice which every one found musical and pleasant, a contented, full-blooded voice.

"It is indeed, sir," said Gardener, as he arranged two silver dishes upon the table – "very dull and cold. I was told that there would be skating on Port Meadow as I came into college this morning."

"Well, I don't think it will tempt me," said the duke. "You understand thoroughly about lunch?"

"Thoroughly, sir, thank you. Do you wish anything else now, sir?"

"Nothing more, Gardener. You can go."

"I thank your grace," said the scout, and left the room. Gardener had brought the art of politeness to a high point. Indeed, he had elevated it to a science. He always made a distinction, thoroughly understood and appreciated by his masters, between himself and the ordinary flunkey

or house servant. He called a duke or a marquis "sir" in general address, reserving the title for the moment of leaving the room, thus showing that he did not forget the claims of rank, while he was too well-bred to weary his hearer by undue repetition.

The duke began his breakfast – a chop and a poached egg. The young man was by no means of a luxurious turn of mind as far as his personal tastes were concerned. Simplicity was the keynote of many of his actions. But he was very punctilious that everything about him should be "just so," and had he dined on a dish of lentils he would have liked them cooked by Escoffier.

There was a pile of letters by his plate. He opened them one by one, throwing most of them on to an adjacent chair for his secretary – who called every day at eleven – to answer.

One of the letters bore the cardinal's hat, which is the crest of Christ Church College, and was from the duke's greatest friend in the university, Viscount Hayle.

This was the letter:

"MY DEAR JOHN, – My father and sister arrived to-night, and, as I supposed, they will be delighted to lunch to-morrow. You said at one, didn't you? I have been dining with them at the *Randolph*, but I have come back to college, as I must read for a couple of hours before I go to bed.

"Yours,

"GERALD."

Gerald, Viscount Hayle, was the only son of the Earl of Camborne, who was a spiritual as well as a temporal peer inasmuch as he was the Bishop of Carlton, the great northern manufacturing centre.

Lord Hayle and the Duke of Paddington had gone up to Oxford in the same term. They were of equal ages, and many of their tastes and opinions were identical, while the remaining differences of temperament and thought only served to accentuate their strong friendship and to give it a wholesome tonic quality.

The duke had met Lord Camborne once only. He had never stayed at the palace, though often pressed to do so by Lord Hayle. Something or other had always intervened to prevent it. The two young men had not known each other during their school days – the duke had been at Eton, his friend at Winchester – and their association had been simply at the university.

Now the bishop, who was a widower, was coming to Oxford for a few days, to be present at a reception to be given to Herr Schmölder, the famous German Biblical scholar, and was bringing his daughter, Lady Constance Camborne, with him.

As he ate his nectarine the duke wondered what sort of a girl Lady Constance was. That she was very lovely he knew from general report, and Gerald also was extremely good-looking. But he wondered if she was like all the other girls he knew, accomplished, charming, sometimes beautiful and always smart, but – stereotyped.

That was just what all society girls were; they always struck him as having been made in exactly the same mould. They said the same sort of things in the same sort of voice. Their thoughts ran in grooves, not necessarily narrow or limited grooves, but identical ones.

Before he had finished breakfast the duke's valet entered. The man was his own private servant, and of course lived out of college, while there was a perpetual feud between him and old Gardener, the scout.

The man carried two large boxes of thin wood in his hands.

"The orchids have come, your grace," he said. "They were sent down from the shop in Piccadilly by an early train in answer to my telegram. I went to the station this morning to get them."

"Oh, very well, Proctor," said the duke. "Thank you. Just open the boxes and I will look at them. Then you can arrange them in the other room. I sha'n't have any flowers on the table at lunch."

In a minute Proctor had opened the boxes and displayed the wealth of strange, spotted blooms within – monstrous exotic flowers, beautiful with a morbid and almost unhealthy beauty.

The duke was a connoisseur of orchids. "Yes, these will do very well," he said. "Now you can take them out."

The man, a slim, clean-shaven young fellow, with dark eyes and a resolute jaw, hesitated a moment as if about to speak.

The duke, who had found a certain pleasure in thinking of his friend's sister and wondering if she would be like her brother, had been lost in a vague but pleasing reverie in fact, looked up sharply. He wanted to be alone again. He wanted to catch up the thread of his thoughts. "Well?" he said. "I think I told you to go, Proctor?"

The valet flushed at his master's tone. Then he seemed to make an effort. "I beg your grace's pardon," he said. "I wish to give you my notice."

The duke stared at his valet. "Why, what on earth do you mean?" he said. "You've only been with me for nine months, and I have found you satisfactory in every way. You have just learnt all my habits and exactly how I like things done. And now you want to leave me! Are you aware, Proctor, that you enjoy a situation that many men would give their ears for?"

"Indeed, your grace, I know that I am fortunate, and that there are many that would envy me."

"Then don't talk any more nonsense. What do I pay you? A hundred and twenty pounds a year, isn't it? Well, then, take another twenty pounds. Now go and arrange the orchids."

"I am very sorry, your grace," Proctor said. "But I do not seek any increase of wages. I respectfully ask you to accept my month's notice."

A certain firmness and determination had come into the valet's voice. It irritated the duke. It was a note to which he was not accustomed. But he tried to keep his temper.

"What are your reasons for wishing to leave me?" he said, asking the direct question for the first time.

"I have been successful with a small invention, your grace. I occupy my spare time with mechanics. It is an improved lock and key, and a firm have taken it up."

"Have they paid you?" said the duke.

"A certain sum down, your grace, and a royalty is to follow on future sales."

"I congratulate you, I'm sure," the duke said, with an unconsciously contemptuous smile, for he shared the not uncommon opinion among certain people that there is something ludicrous in the originality of a servant. "No idea you were such a clever fellow. But I don't see why you should want to leave me. Because you are my servant it won't interfere with you collecting your royalties or whatever they are."

The duke was a kind-hearted young man enough. He did not mean to wound his valet, but he had never been accustomed to think of such people as quite human – human in the sense that he himself was human – and his tone was far more unpleasant than he had any idea of.

The valet flushed up. Then he did an extraordinary thing. He took two five-pound notes from his pocket and placed them upon the table.

"That is a month's wages, your grace," he said, "instead of a month's notice. I am no longer your servant, nor any man's."

As he spoke the whole aspect of the valet changed. He seemed to stand more upright, his eyes had a curious light in them, his lips were parted as one who inhales pure air after being long in a close room.

The duke's face grew pale with anger. "What do you mean by this?" he said in a voice which was a strange mixture of passion and astonishment.

"Exactly what I say, sir," Proctor answered. "That I am no longer in your service. I have done all that is legally necessary to discharge myself. And I have a word to say to you. You are not likely to hear such words addressed to you again, until your class and all it means is swept away for ever. You sneer at me because I have dared to invent something, to produce something, to add something to the world's wealth and the world's comfort. What have you ever done? What have you ever contributed

to society? I am a better man than you are, and worth more to society, because I've worked for my living and earned my daily bread, even though fortune made me your body servant. But I'm free now, and, mark what I say, read the signs of the times, if one in your position can have any insight into truth at all! Read the signs of the times, and be sure that before you and I are old men we shall be equal in the eyes of the world as we are unequal now! There aren't going to be any more drones in the hive. Men aren't going to have huge stores of private property any more. You won't be allowed to own land which is the property of every one."

He stopped suddenly in the flood of high-pitched, agitated speech, quivering with excitement, a man transformed and carried away. Was this the suave, quiet fellow who had brushed the clothes and put studs into the shirts? With an involuntary gesture the duke passed his hand before his eyes. He was astounded at this sudden volcanic outburst. Nothing, as Balzac said, is more alarming than the rebellion of a sheep.

But as Proctor's voice died away his excitement seemed to go with it, or at any rate long habit and training checked and mastered it. The man bowed, not without dignity, and when he spoke again his voice was once more the old respectful one. "I beg your grace's pardon," he said, "if I have been disrespectful. There are times when a man loses control of himself, and what is beneath the surface will out. Your grace will find everything in perfect order." He withdrew without another word and passed out of his master's life.

The duke was left staring at the masses of orchids which lay before him on the table.

When Gardener, the scout, entered he found the duke still in the same position – lost in a sort of day-dream.

CHAPTER II

"HAIR LIKE RIPE CORN"

The duke was reciting his adventure with the valet to his three guests, but he glanced most often at Lady Constance Camborne.

No, the society journals and society talk hadn't exaggerated her beauty a bit – she was far and away the loveliest girl he had ever seen. He knew it directly she came into the room with Lord Hayle and the bishop, the influence of such extraordinary beauty was felt like a physical blow. The girl was of a Saxon type, but with all the colouring accentuated. The hair which crowned the small, patrician head in shining masses was golden. But it was not pale gold, metallic gold, or flaxen. It was a deep, rich gold, an "old gold," and the duke, with a somewhat unaccustomed flight of fancy, compared it in his mind to ripe corn. Her eyebrows were very dark brown, almost black, and the great eyes, with their long black lashes, were dark as a southern night. Under their great coronet of yellow hair, and set in a face whose contour was a pure and perfect oval, with a skin like the inside of a seashell, the contrast was extraordinarily effective. Her beautiful lips had the rare lines of the unbroken Greek bow, and their colour was like wine. She was tall in figure, even as though some marble goddess had stepped down from her pedestal in the Louvre and assumed the garments of the daughters of men. Some people said that, beautiful as she was in every way, her crowning beauty was her hands. She had sat to Pozzi, at Milan, at the great sculptor's earnest request, so that he might perpetuate the glory of her hands for ever. Mr. Swinburne had written a sonnet, shown only to a favoured few and never published, about her hands.

The duke talked on. Outwardly he was calm enough, within his brain was in a turmoil entirely fresh to it, entirely new and unexpected. He heard his own voice mechanically relating the incident of Proctor's rebellion, but he gave hardly a thought to what he said. For all he knew he might have been talking the most absolute nonsense.

He was lost in wonder that one living, moving human being could be so fair!

He felt a sort of unreasoning anger with his friend, Lord Hayle. Why hadn't Gerald introduced him to his sister before? Why had all this time been wasted? – quite forgetting the repeated invitations he had received to stay with the Cambornes.

"Well, what did you do in the end, John?" said Lord Hayle. "Did you kick the fellow out? I should have pitched him down the staircase, by Jove!"

"As a matter of fact, I did nothing at all," said the duke. "I was too surprised. I just sat still and let him talk; I was quite tongue-tied."

"More's the pity," said the young viscount, a lean, sinewy lad, who rowed three in the 'Varsity boat. "I should have made very short work of him."

"Don't be such a savage, Gerald," Lady Constance answered. "It was very rude, of course; but from what the duke says, the man was not exactly what you would call impudent, and he apologised at the end. And nowadays every one has a right to his own opinions. We don't live in the middle ages any longer."

Her voice was like a silver bell, the duke thought, as the girl voiced these somewhat republican sentiments. A silver bell, was it? No, it was like water falling into water, like a flute playing in a wood at a great distance.

"My daughter is quite a Radical, Paddington," said Lord Camborne, with a smile. "She'll grow out of it when she gets a little older. But I found her reading the *Fabian Essays* the other day; actually the *Fabian Essays*!" – the bishop said it with a shudder. "And she met John Burns at a ministerial reception, and said he was charming!"

"It's all very well for Constance," said Lord Hayle; "a girl plays at that sort of thing, and if it amuses her it hurts nobody else. However much Connie talks about equality, and all that, she'd never sit down to dinner with the butler. But it's quite another thing when all these chaps are getting elected to Parliament and making all these new laws. If it isn't stopped, no one will be safe. It's getting quite alarming. For my part, I wish a chap like Lord Kitchener could be made Dictator of England for a month. He'd have all the Socialists up against a wall and shoot them in no time. Then things would be right again."

Lord Hayle concluded in his best college debating society manner, and drank a glass of hock and seltzer in a bloodthirsty and determined manner.

The bishop, a tall, portly man, with a singularly fine face and extreme graciousness of manner – he was most popular at Court, and it was said would certainly go to Canterbury when Dr. – died, – laughed a little at his son's vehemence.

"That would hardly solve the problem," he said. "But it will solve itself. I am quite sure that there is no real reason for alarm. The country is beginning to wake up to the real character of the Socialist leaders. It will no longer listen to them. Men of sense are beginning to perceive that the great fact of inequality as between man and man is everywhere stamped in ineffaceable characters. Men are not equal, and they never will be while talent, and talent alone, produces wealth. Democracy is nothing but a piece of humbug from beginning to end – a transparent attempt to flatter a mass of stupid mediocrity which is too dull to appreciate the language of its hypocritical and time-serving admirers. These contemptible courtiers of the mob no more believe in equality than the ruin-bringing demagogues of ancient Athens did. One only has to watch them to see how eager they are to feather their nests at the expense of all the geese that will stand plucking. Observe how they scheme and contrive to secure official positions so that they may lord it over the general herd of common workers. They have their own little game to play, and beyond their own self-interest they do not care a straw. Knowing that they are unfit to succeed either in commercial or industrial pursuits, they try to extend the sphere of governmental regulation. What for? To supply themselves with congenial jobs where they won't be subject to the keen test of industrial and commercial competition, and will be less likely to be found out for the worthless wind-bags that they are!"

The bishop paused. He had spoken as one having authority; quite in the grand manner, bland, serene, and a little pompous. He half-opened his mouth to continue, looked round to recognise that his audience was a young one, and thought better of it. He drank half a glass of port instead.

The conversation changed to less serious matters, and in another minute or so Gardener entered to say that coffee was ready in the other room.

The "sitter," to use the Oxford slang word, was very large. It was, indeed, one of the finest rooms in the whole of Paul's. Three tall oriel windows lighted it, it was panelled in dark oak, and there was a large open fire-place. It was a man's room. Luxurious as it was in all its furniture appointments and colouring, all was nevertheless strongly masculine. The rows of briar pipes, in their racks, a pile of hunting crops and riding switches in one corner, a tandem horn, the pictures of dogs and horses upon the walls, and three or four gun-cases behind the little black Bord piano, spoke eloquently of male tastes.

Though it is often said, it is generally quite untrue to say, that a man's rooms are an index to his personality. Few people can express themselves in their furniture. The conscious attempt to do so results in over-emphasis and strain. The ideal is either canonised or vulgarised, and the vision within is distorted and lost. At Oxford, especially, very few men succeed in doing more than attaining a convention.

But the duke's rooms really did reflect himself to some extent. They showed a certain freshness of idea and a liking for what was considered and choice. But there was no effeminacy, no over-refinement. They showed simplicity of temperament, and were not complex. Nor was the duke complex.

Lady Constance was peculiarly susceptible to the influences of material and external things. She was extremely quick to gather and weigh impressions – the room interested her, her brother's friend interested her already. She found something in his personality which was attractive.

The whole atmosphere of these ancient Oxford rooms pleased and stimulated her, and she talked brightly and well, revealing a mind with real originality and a gentle and sympathetic wit most rare in girls of her age.

"And what are you going to do in the vacation?" the bishop asked the duke.

"For the first three or four weeks I shall be in town; then I'm going down to Norfolk. I sha'n't stay at Fakenham, Lord Leicester is putting me up; but we are going to shoot over Fakenham. I can't stay all alone in that great place, you know, though I did think of having some men down. However, that was before the Leicesters asked me. Then I am to be at Sandringham for three days for the theatricals. It is the first time I have been there, you know."

"You'll find it delightful," said the bishop. "The King is the best host in England. On the three occasions when I have had the honour of an invitation I have thoroughly enjoyed myself. Where are you staying when you are in town – at Paddington House?"

"Oh, no! That would be worse than Fakenham! Paddington House was let, always, during my minority, but for two years now there have just been a few servants there, but no one living in the house. My agent looks after all that. No, I am engaging some rooms at the *Carlton*. It's near everywhere. I have a lot of parties to go to, and Claridge's is always so full of German grand dukes!"

"But why not come to us in Grosvenor Street?" said the bishop. "You've never been able to accept any of Gerald's invitations yet. Here is an opportunity. I have to be in town for three or four weeks, at the House of Lords and the Westminster conference of the bishops. You'd much better come to us. We'll do our best to make you comfortable."

"Oh, do come, John!" said Lord Hayle.

"Yes, please come, duke," said Lady Constance.

"It's awfully good of you, Lord Camborne," said the duke; "I shall be delighted to come."

It was a dark and gloomy afternoon – indeed, the electric bulbs in their silver candelabra were all turned on. But suddenly it seemed to the duke that the sun was shining and there was bird music in the air. He looked at Lady Constance. "I shall be delighted to come," he said again.

They chatted on, and presently the duke found himself standing by one of the tall windows talking to his friend's sister. Lord Hayle, himself an enthusiastic amateur of art, was showing his father some of the treasures upon the walls.

"How dreary it is to-day – the weather, I mean," – said the girl. "There has been a dense fog in town for the last three days, I see by the papers. And through it all the poor unemployed men have been tramping and holding demonstrations without anything to eat. I can't help thinking of the poor things."

The duke had not thought about the unemployed before, but now he made a mental vow to send a big cheque to the Lord Mayor's fund.

"It must be very hard for them," he said vaguely. "I remember meeting one of their processions once when I was walking down Piccadilly."

"The street of your palace!" she answered more brightly. "Devonshire House, Paddington House, and Apsley House, and all the clubs in between! It must be interesting to have a palace in London. I suppose Paddington House is very splendid inside, isn't it? I have never seen more of it than the upper windows and the huge wall in front."

"Well, it is rather gorgeous," he said; "though I never go there, or, at least, hardly ever. But I have a book of photographs here. I will show them to you, Lady Constance, if I may. So far we've succeeded in keeping them out of the illustrated magazines."

"Oh, please do!" she said. "Father, the duke is going to show me some pictures of the rooms of his mysterious great place in Piccadilly."

As she spoke there was a knock upon the door, and the scout came in with a telegram upon a tray.

"I thought I had better bring it at once, sir," he said; "it's marked 'urgent' upon the envelope." With an apology, the duke opened the flimsy orange-coloured wrapping.

Then he started, his face grew rather paler, and he gave a sudden exclamation. "Good heavens!" he said, "listen to this:

"Large portion front west wing Paddington House destroyed by explosion an hour ago. Bomb filled with picric acid discovered intact near gateway. The smaller Gainsborough and the Florence vase destroyed. Please come up town immediately.

"SIMPSON."

There was a dead silence in the room.

CHAPTER III

A MOST SURPRISING DAY

Lord Camborne, Lord Hayle, and Lady Constance stared at the duke in amazement as he read the extraordinary telegram from Colonel Simpson. Lady Constance was the first to speak. "And you were just getting the book of photographs!" she said in a bewildered voice, "the photographs of Paddington House, and now – "

"Read the wire again, John," said Lord Hayle.

The duke did so; it was quite clear:

"Large portion front west wing Paddington House destroyed by explosion an hour ago. Bomb filled with picric acid discovered intact near gateway. The smaller Gainsborough and the Florence vase destroyed. Please come up town immediately.
"*SIMPSON.*"

"The smaller Gainsborough – that's the famous portrait of Lady Honoria FitzTracy," said Lord Hayle suddenly. "Why, it's the finest example of Gainsborough in existence!"

He grew pale with sympathy as he looked at his friend.

"It isn't in existence any more, apparently," said the duke. "I wish the Florence vase had been saved. My father gave ten thousand pounds for it – not that the money matters – but, you see, it was the only one in the world, except the smaller example in the Vatican."

The bishop broke in with a slight trace of impatience in his voice. "My dear young men," he said, "surely the great question is: Who has perpetrated this abominable outrage? What does it all mean? What steps are being – "

He stopped short. Gardener had entered with another telegram.

"Man arrested on suspicion, known to belong to advanced socialist or anarchist group. Can you catch the fast train up? There is one at six. I will meet you with car.
"*SIMPSON.*"

"Well, here is a sort of answer," said the duke, handing the telegram to the bishop. "It appears that the thing is another of those kindly and amiable protests which the lower classes make against their betters from time to time."

"Just what I was saying," young Lord Hayle broke in eagerly, "just what I was saying a few minutes ago. It's all the result of educating the lower classes sufficiently to make them discontented and to put these scoundrelly socialists and blackguards into Parliament. They'll be trying Buckingham Palace or Marlborough House next! Probably this is the work of those unemployed gentry whom I heard Constance defending just now."

"It's a bad business," said Lord Camborne gravely; "a very black, bad business indeed. Paddington, you have my sincerest sympathy. I am afraid that in the shock of the news we may have been a little remiss in expressing our grief, but you know, my dear boy, how we all feel for you."

He went up to the duke as he spoke, a grand and stately old man, and shook him warmly by the hand.

"Yes, John," said Lord Hayle, "we really are awfully sorry, old chap."

Lady Constance said nothing, but she looked at her host, and it was enough. He forgot the news, he forgot everything save only the friendship and kindness in her eyes.

"I suppose you will go up to town by the six o'clock train?" Lord Hayle said.

"I suppose I must, Gerald," the duke replied. "I must go and get leave from the dean later on. I expect I shall have to stay the night. It's not an inviting day for London, is it?"

"Do you know, duke, that I think you are taking it remarkably well," Lady Constance said with a sudden dazzling smile. "I should have been terribly frightened, and then cried my eyes out about the vase and the picture. And as for Hayle – well, I think I can imagine the way Hayle would have behaved."

"Well, of course, I'm horribly angry," the duke said, "and such a thing means a great deal more to society in general than its mere personal aspect to me. But I can't somehow feel it very nearly; it seems remote. I should realize it far more if any one were to steal or break anything in these rooms here – things I constantly touch and see, things I live with. I have so many houses and pictures and things that I never see; they don't seem part of one."

"I can quite understand that," said the bishop; "but that will all be changed some day, please God, before very long. You are only on the threshold of life as yet, you know."

He smiled paternally at the young man, and there was a good deal of meaning in his smile. The duke, not ordinarily sensitive about such things, blushed a little now. He was quite aware to what Lord Camborne referred.

The bishop, astute courtier and diplomatist that he was, marked the blush, pretended not to notice it, and was secretly well pleased. He himself was earl as well as bishop, he was wealthy, he was certain of the Primacy. His daughter, whom he loved and admired more than any other living thing, was a match for any one with her rank and wealth and loveliness. He longed to see her happily married also. At the same time, good man as he was, he was by his very nature and training a worldly man.

If, therefore, the two young people fell in love with each other – well, it would be a very charming arrangement, to say the least of it, Lord Camborne thought. For, far and away above all other fortunate young noblemen, the duke was the greatest *parti* of the day; he stood alone.

"I've got three hours or more before the train goes," said the duke, "and I can dine on board; there's a car, I know. Now, do let's forget this troublesome business. I'm so sorry, Lady Constance, that it should have happened while you were here. Let's shut out this horrid afternoon."

He spoke with light-hearted emphasis, with gaiety even. Despite what had happened he felt thoroughly happy, his blood ran swiftly in his veins, his pulses throbbed to exhilarating measures. Oh, how beautiful she was! How gracious and lovely!

He went to the windows and pulled the heavy crimson curtains over them, shutting out the wan, grey light of the November afternoon.

He made Gardener bring candles – innumerable candles – to supplement the glow of the electric lights. More logs were cast upon the fire – logs of sawn cedar wood which gave flames of rose-pink and amethyst. The noble room was illuminated as if for a feast.

Lord Hayle entered into the spirit of the thing, *con amore*. His spirits rose with those of his friend, and his sister also caught the note, while Lord Camborne, smoking a cigar by the fire, watched the three young people with a benevolent smile.

Lady Constance had been sitting by the piano. "Do you play, Lady Constance?" the duke asked.

"She's one of the best amateur pianists I've ever heard," said Lord Hayle.

"Do play something, Lady Constance. What will you give us?"

"It depends on the sort of music you like. Do you like Chopin?"

"I am very fond of Chopin indeed."

"I'll tell you what to play, Connie," said Lord Hayle eagerly. "Play that wonderful nocturne, I forget the number, where the bell comes in. The one with the story about it."

"A story?" said the duke.

"Yes; don't you know it, John? Chopin had just come back from his villa at Majorca – come back to Paris at a time when Georges Sand would have nothing more to do with him. He was living close to Notre Dame. He had a supper by appointment, but began to write his nocturne and forgot all about the time. He was nearing the end when the big bell of the cathedral began to toll midnight. He realised how late it was, and forced himself to finish the thing in a hurry. He wove the twelve

great 'clangs' into the theme. It's marvellously romantic and Gothic. One seems to see Victor Hugo's dwarf, Quasimodo, upon the tower, drinking in the midnight air."

Lady Constance sat down at the piano and began the nocturne. The beautiful hands flashed over the keys, whiter than the ivory on which they pressed, her face was grave with the joy of what she was doing.

And as the duke listened the time and place faded utterly away.

The passionate and yet fantastic music pealed out into the room and destroyed its material appeal to the senses. His brain seemed suddenly aware of a larger and more fully-coloured life than he had ever known before, ever thought possible before. He stood upon the threshold of it; it held strange secrets, wonderful chances; there were passionate moments for young blood awaiting!

Here was the agony that lurked in pleasure, the immedicable pain which allured – lights gleamed behind swaying veils.

Clang!

The deep resonance of the iron bell tolled into the dream.

Clang!

The twin towers of Notre Dame were stark and black up in the sky.

Clang!

The dark sky grew rosy, he saw her hands, he saw the light upon her face. It was dark no longer – the bell had tolled away the old day, dawn was at hand, the new day was coming; the dawn of love was rosy in the sky.

* * * * *

It was four o'clock when the duke's guests went away.

He went with them through the two quadrangles of Paul's to the massive gateway, and saw the three tall figures disappear in the mist with a sense of desolation and loss.

But as he was returning to his rooms to get cap and gown in which to visit the dean of his college, he comforted himself with the reflection that term was almost over.

In a week or so he would be in London, staying in the same house with her! The very thought set his heart beating like a drum!

He was nearly at the door of his staircase when he saw a man coming towards him, evidently about to speak to him. It was a man he recognised, though he had never spoken to him, a man called Burnside.

St. Paul's, as it has been said, was a college in which nearly all the undergraduates were rich men. A man of moderate means could not afford to join it. At the same time, as in the case of all colleges, there were half-a-dozen scholarships open to any one. As these scholarships were large in amount they naturally attracted very poor men. At the present moment there were some six or seven scholars of Paul's, who lived almost entirely upon their scholarships and such tutorial work as they could secure in the vacations. But these men lived a life absolutely apart from the other men of the college. They could afford to subscribe to none of the college clubs, they could not dress like other men, they could not entertain. That they were all certain to get first-classes and develop into distinguished men mattered nothing to the young aristocrats of the college. For them the scholars simply did not exist.

Burnside, the duke had heard somewhere or other, was one of the most promising scholars of his year, but he wore rather shabby black clothes, very thick boots, and a made-up tie; he was quite an unimportant person!

He came up to the duke now, his pale intelligent face flushing a little and a very obvious nervousness animating him.

"Might I speak to you a moment?" he said.

The duke looked at him with that peculiar Oxford stare, which is possibly the most insolent expression known to the physiognomist, a cultivated rudeness which the Oxford "blood" learns to discard very quickly indeed when he "goes down" and enters upon the realities of life.

The duke did not mean anything by his stare, however; it was habit, that was all, and seeing the nervousness of his vis-à-vis was growing painful, his face relaxed. "Oh, all right," he said. "What is it – anything I can do? At any rate, come up to my rooms, it's so confoundedly dismal out here this afternoon."

The two men went up the stairs together and entered the huge luxurious sitting-room, with its brilliant lights, its glowing fire, its pictures and flowers. Burnside looked swiftly around him; he had never dreamed of such luxury, and then he began —

"I hope you won't think me impertinent," he said, "but I have just received a telegram from the *Daily Wire*. I occasionally do some work for them. They tell me that part of your town house has been destroyed by an explosion, and that some famous art treasures have been destroyed."

"That's quite true, unfortunately," said the duke.

"And they ask me to obtain an interview with you for to-morrow's paper in order that you may make some statement about your loss." He spoke with an eagerness that almost outweighed, at any rate, alleviated his nervousness.

"Most certainly not!" said the duke sharply. "I wonder that you should permit yourself to make me such a request. I will wish you good-afternoon!"

The other muttered something that sounded like an apology and then turned to go. His face was quite changed. The eagerness passed out of it as though the whole expression had suddenly been wiped off by a sponge. An extraordinary dejection, piteous in the completeness of its disappointment, took its place. The duke had never seen anything so sudden and so profound before; it startled him.

The man was already half-way to the door when the duke spoke again.

"Excuse me," he said, and from mere habit his voice was still cold, "would you mind telling me why you seem so strangely disappointed because I have not granted your request?"

A surprise awaited him. Burnside swung round on his feet, and his voice was tense as he answered.

"Oh, yes, I'll tell you," he said, "though, indeed, how should you understand? The editor of the *Daily Wire* offered me fifteen pounds in his telegram if I could get a column interview with you. I am reading history for my degree, and there are certain German monographs which I can't get a sight of in Oxford or London. The only way is to buy them. Of course, I could not afford to do that, and then suddenly this opportunity came. But you can't understand. Good-afternoon!"

For the second time that day the duke was mildly surprised, but he understood.

"My dear sir," he said in a very different tone, "how was I to guess? I am very sorry, but I really am so – so ignorant of all these things. Come and sit down and interview me to your heart's content. What does it matter, after all? Will you have a whisky and soda, or, perhaps, some tea? I'll call my scout."

In five minutes Burnside was making notes and asking questions with a swift and practical ability that compelled his host's interest and admiration. The duke had never met any one of his own age so business-like and alert. His own friends and contemporaries were so utterly different. He became quite confidential, and found that he was really enjoying the conversation.

After the interview was over the two young men remained talking frankly to each other for a few minutes, and, wide as the poles asunder in rank, birth, and fortune, they were mutually pleased. For both of them it was a new and stimulating experience, and the peer realised how narrow his views of Oxford must necessarily be. Suddenly a thought struck him.

"Wait a minute," he said. "I think I have something here that will interest you."

He went to his writing-table, and, after some search, found a letter. It was a long business document from his chief agent, Colonel Simpson.

"I want to read you this paragraph from my agent's last letter," he said.

"... There is another matter to which I wish to draw your grace's attention. As you are aware, the libraries, both at Fakenham and Paddington House, are of extreme value and interest, but since the death of the late librarian, Mr. Fox, no steps have been taken to fill his position. When he died Mr. Fox was half-way through the work of compiling a comprehensive and scholarly catalogue of your grace's literary treasures. Would it not be as well to have this catalogue completed by a competent person in view of the fact that sooner or later your grace will be probably throwing open the two houses again?"

"Now, wouldn't that suit you, Mr. Burnside, as work in the vacation, don't you know? It would last a couple of years or so probably, and you need not give all your time to it, even if you take your degree meanwhile and read for the Bar, as you tell me you mean to. I would pay you, say, four hundred a year, if you think that is enough," he added hastily, wondering if he ought to have offered more.

The young man's stammering gratitude soon undeceived him, and as Burnside left him his last words sent a glow of satisfaction through him – "I won't say any more than just this, your splendid offer has removed all obstacles from my path. The career I have mapped out for myself is now absolutely assured."

For half an hour longer the duke remained alone, thinking of the events of the day, thinking especially of Lady Constance Camborne. He did not give a thought to the smaller Gainsborough or the Florentine vase, and he was entirely ignorant that he had just done something which was to have a marked and definite influence upon his future life.

By six o'clock he had wired to Colonel Simpson, had obtained the necessary exeat from the dean, and was entering a first-class carriage in the fast train from Oxford to London.

The fog was thick all along the line, and more than once the express was stopped for some minutes when the muffled report of fog signals, like guns fired under a blanket, could be heard in the dark.

One such stop occurred when, judging by the time and such blurred indications of gaunt housebacks as he could discern, the duke felt that they must be just outside Paddington Station.

He had the carriage to himself, brightly lit, warm, and comfortable. He sat there, wrapped in his heavy, sable-lined coat, a little drowsy and tired, though with a pleasant sense of well-being, despite the errand which was bringing him to London.

The noise of the train died away and the engine stopped. Voices could be heard talking in the silence, voices which seemed very far away.

Then there was the roar of an advancing train somewhere in the distance, a roar which grew louder and louder, one or two sudden shouts, and then a frightful crash as if a thunderbolt had burst, a shrill multiple cry of fear, and finally the long, rending noise of timber and iron breaking into splinters.

The duke heard all this, and even as his brain realised what it meant, he was thrown violently up into the air – so it seemed to him – he caught sight of the light in the roof of the carriage for the thousandth part of a second, and then everything flashed away into darkness and silence.

CHAPTER IV

THE MAN WITH THE MUSTARD-COLOURED BEARD

It was the morning of the day on which part of the façade of Paddington House, Piccadilly, was destroyed by the explosion of a bomb.

London was a city of darkness and gloom, a veritable "city of dreadful night."

The fog was everywhere, it was bitter cold, and all the lights in the shops and the lamps in the streets were lit. As yet the fog was some few yards above the house-tops. It had not descended, as it did later on in the day, into the actual streets themselves. It lay, a terrible leaden pall, a little above them.

In no part of London did the fog seem more dreary than in Bloomsbury. The gaunt squares, the wide, old-fashioned streets, were like gashes cut into a face of despair.

At half-past nine o'clock Mary Marriott came out of her tiny bedroom into her tiny sitting-room and lit the gas. She lived on the topmost floor of a great Georgian house in a narrow street just off Bedford Square. In the old days, before there were fogs, and when trees were still green in the heart of London, a great man had lived in this house. The neighbourhood was fashionable then, and all the world had not moved westwards. The staircase at No. 102 was guarded by carved balusters, the ceilings of the lower rooms were worked in the ornate plaster of Adams, the doors were high, and the lintels delicately fluted. Now 102 was let out in lodgings, some furnished, some unfurnished. Mary Marriott had two tiny rooms under the roof. On the little landing outside was a small gas-stove and some shelves, upon which were a few pots and pans. A curtain screened this off from the stairhead. This was the kitchen. The furniture, what there was of it, was Mary's own, and, in short, she might, had she been so disposed, have called her dwelling almost a flat. Moreover, she paid her rent quarterly – five pounds every three months – and was quite an independent householder.

Mary was an actress, a hard-working member of the rank and file. She had never yet secured even the smallest engagement in London, and most of her life was spent on tour in the provinces. When she was away she locked up her rooms.

She was without any relations, except a sister, who was married to a curate in Birmingham. Her private income was exactly thirty pounds a year, the interest upon a thousand pounds safely invested. This paid the rent of the rooms which were all she had to call "home," and left her ten pounds over. Every penny in addition to this she must earn by the exercise of her art.

She had been lucky during her four years of stage life in rarely being out of an engagement. She had never played a leading part, even in the provinces, but her second parts had generally been good. If she had come nowhere near success she had been able to keep herself and save a little, a very little, money for a rainy day. It is astonishing on how little two careful girls, chumming together, can live on tour. Managing in this way it was an extravagant week when Mary spent thirty shillings upon her share of the week's bill, and as she never earned less than three pounds she felt herself fortunate. She knew piteous things of girls who were less fortunate than she.

She came into the room and lit the gas. It was not a beautiful room, some people would have called it a two-penny-halfpenny room, but it was comfortable, there was a gracious feminine touch about all its simple appointments, and to Mary Marriott it represented home.

The chairs were of wicker-work, with cretonne cushions – sixteen-and-six each in the Tottenham Court Road. The pictures were chiefly photographs of theatrical friends, the curtains were a cheap art-green rep, the carpet plain Indian matting – so easy to clean! But the colours were all harmonious, and a shelf holding nearly two hundred books gave a finishing note of pleasant habitableness.

The girl moved with that grace which is not languid but alert. There was a spring and balance in her walk that made one think of a handsome boy; for though the lithe and beautiful figure was

girlish enough, few girls learn to move from the hips, erect and unswayed, as she moved, or often suggest the temper and resilience of a foil. The simple grey tweed coat and the slim skirts that hung so superbly gave every movement its full value.

She had not yet put on her hat, but her coat would keep her warm while she ate her frugal breakfast and save the necessity of lighting the fire, as she was shortly going out.

Her hair was dead-black with the blackness of bog-oak root or of basalt. She did not wear it in any of the modes of the moment, but gathered up in a great coiled knot at the back of her head.

In shape, Mary Marriott's face was one of those semi-ovals which one has forgotten in the Greek rooms of the Louvre and remembered in some early Victorian miniatures. It was grave, and the corners of the almost perfect mouth were slightly depressed, like the Greek bow reversed.

The violet eyes were not hard, but they did not seem quite happy. It was almost a petulance with environment which seemed written there, and, in the words of a great master of English prose, "the eyelids were a little weary." All her face, indeed, – in the general impression it gave, – seemed to have that constant preoccupation that hints at the pursuit of something not yet won.

She might have been four or five-and-twenty. Her face was not the face of a young, unknowing girl – no early morning fruit in a basket with its bloom untouched. Yet it was still possible to imagine that her indifferent loveliness could wake suddenly to all the caresses and surrenders of spring. But the ordained day must dawn for that. Like a sundial, one might have said of her that her message was told only under the serenest skies, and that even then it must come with shadow.

She lit the stove on the landing to boil some water for her cocoa and egg. Then she took the necessary crockery from a cupboard, together with the loaf and butter she had bought last night.

While the simple meal was in progress her low forehead was wrinkled with thought. A long tour was just over in the fairly prosperous repertoire company with which she had been associated for eighteen months. Usually at this season of the year the company played right through till the spring at those provincial theatres where no pantomimes were produced. This year, however, it had been disbanded until March, when Mary was at liberty to rejoin if she had not meanwhile found another engagement.

This was what she was trying to do, at present with no success at all. She was tired to death of the monotonous touring business. She felt that she had better work within her had she only a chance to show it. But it was horribly difficult to get that chance. She had no influence with London managers whatever. Her name was not known in any way, and as the days went by the hopelessness of her ambition seemed to become more and more apparent.

This morning the heavy pall which lay over London seemed to crush her spirits. She was so alone, life was drab and cheerless.

With a sigh she strove to banish black thoughts. "I won't give up!" she said aloud, stamping a little foot upon the floor. "I know I've got something in me, and I won't give up!"

When breakfast was over, she swept up the crumbs from the tablecloth, opened the window, and scattered them upon the leads for the birds – her invariable custom. Then she went into her bedroom, made the bed, and tidied everything, for she did all her own housework when she was "at home," though a charwoman came once a week to "turn out" the rooms.

When she had put on her hat and gloves and returned to the sitting-room she found two or three cheeky little London sparrows were chirping over their meal on the parapet, and she stood motionless to watch them. As she did so she saw a new arrival. A robin, with bright, hungry eyes, in his warm scarlet waistcoat, had joined the feathered group. Nearly all the crumbs were disposed of by this time, and, greatly daring, the little creature hopped on to the window-sill, looked timidly round him for a moment, and then flew right over to the table where the bread-latter still stood. With an odd little chirp of satisfaction the bird seized a morsel of bread as big as a nut in his tiny beak and flashed out through the window again, this time flying right away into the fog.

"Oh, you dear! – you perfect dear!" Mary said, clapping her hands. "Why didn't you stay longer?" And as she went down the several staircases to the hall the little incident remained with her and cheered her. "I shall have some luck to-day," she thought. "I feel quite certain I shall have some luck. One of the agents will have heard of something that will suit me; I am confident of it." And all the time that she walked briskly towards the theatrical quarter of London the sense of impending good fortune remained with her, despite the increasing gloom of the day.

It was with almost a certainty of it that she turned into the district around Covent Garden and crossed the frontier as it were of the world of mimes.

It is a well-defined country, this patch of stage-land in the middle of London. The man who knows could take a map of the metropolis and pencil off an area that would contain it with the precision of a gazetteer. Wellington Street on the east, St. Martin's Lane on the west, Long Acre on the north, and the Strand on the south – these are its boundaries.

Yet to the ordinary passer-by it is a *terra incognita*, its very existence is unsuspected, and he might hurry through the very centre of it without knowing that he was there at all.

Mary made straight for Virgin Lane, a long, narrow street leading from Bedford Street to Covent Garden Market – the street where all the theatrical agents have their offices. The noise of traffic sank to a distant hum as she entered it. Instead, the broken sound of innumerable conversations met her ear, for the pavements, and the road itself, were crowded with men and women who were standing about just as the jobbers and brokers do after closing time outside the Stock Exchange.

The men were nearly all clean-shaven, and they were alike in a marked fashion. Dress varied and features differed, but every face bore a definite stamp and impress. Perhaps colour had something to do with it. Nearly every face had the look of a somewhat faded chalk drawing. They shared a certain opaqueness of skin in common. What colour there was seemed streaky – the pastel drawing seemed at close quarters. There was an odd sketchiness about these faces, no one of them quite expressed what it hinted at. The men were a rather seedy-looking lot, but the women were mostly well dressed – some of them over-dressed. But they seemed to wear their frocks as costumes, not as clothes, and to have that peculiar consciousness people have when they wear what we call "fancy dress."

Mary entered an open door with a brass-plate at the side, on which "Seaton's Dramatic and Musical Agency" was inscribed. She walked up some uncarpeted stairs and entered two large rooms opening into each other. The walls were covered with theatrical portraits, and both rooms were already half-full of people, men and women. A clerk sat at a writing-table in the outer room taking the names of each person as he or she came, writing them down on slips of paper, and sending them into a third inner room, which was the private sanctum of Mr. Seaton, the agent himself.

Mary sent in her name and sat down. Now and again some girl or man whom she knew would come in and do the same, generally coming up to her for a few words of conversation – for she was a popular girl. But most people's eyes were resolutely fixed upon the door of the agent's room, in the hope that he would appear and that a word might be obtained with him. Now and then this actually happened. Seaton, a tall man, with a cavalry moustache, would pop his head out, instead of sending his secretary, and call for this or that person. As often as not there was a hurried rush of all the others and a chorus of agitated appeals: "Just one moment, Mr. Seaton," "I sha'n't keep you a moment, dear boy," "I've something of the utmost importance to tell you."

And all the time the page-boy kept returning with the slips of paper upon which the actors and actresses had written their names upon entering, and finding out particular individuals. Some few were fortunate. "Mr. Seaton would like to see you at twelve, miss. He has something he thinks might suit you"; but by far the more usual formula was, "Mr. Seaton is very sorry, there is nothing suitable to-day; but would you mind calling again to-morrow."

At last it was Mary's turn. She was talking to a Miss Dorothy French, a girl who had been with her on the recent tour, when the boy came up to her. "Mr. Seaton is very sorry that there is nothing suitable to-day, miss; but would you mind calling again to-morrow."

Mary sighed. "I've been here for two hours," she said, "and now there is nothing after all. And, somehow or other, I felt sure I should get something to-day."

She was continuing to bewail her lot when a very singular-looking man indeed entered the room and went up to the clerk.

He was tall and dressed in loose, light tweeds, a flopping terra-cotta tie, a hat of soft felt, and a turn-down collar. His hair, beard, and moustache were a curious and unusual yellow – mustard colour, in fact. His eyes were coal black and very bright, while his face was as pale as linen.

Directly the clerk saw him he rose at once with a most deferential manner and almost ran to the agent's private room. In a second more he was back and obsequiously conducting the man with the mustard-coloured beard into the sanctum.

Mary and her friend left the office together and went out into the choking fog, which was now much lower and thicker. Both were members of the Actors Association, the club of ordinary members of their profession, and they planned to take their simple lunch there, read the *Stage* and the *Era*, and see if they could hear of anything going.

As they went down the stairs Mary said, "You saw that odd-looking man with the yellow beard – evidently some one of importance? Well, do you know, Dolly, I can't help thinking that I've seen him before somewhere. I can't remember where, but I'm almost sure of it."

The other girl started.

"What a strange thing, dear," she said. "I had exactly the same sort of feeling, but I thought it must be a mistake. I wonder who he can be?"

"He is a most unusual-looking person, though certainly distinguished – Now I remember, Dolly!"

"Where?"

"Why, at Swindon, of course, on the last week of the tour, and, if I don't forget, on the last night, too – the Saturday night. He was in evening things, in a box, with another man, a clergyman. He stayed for the first two acts, but when I came on in the third act he was gone!"

"So it was! You're quite right. Now I remember perfectly. What a curious coincidence!"

They discussed the incident for the remainder of their short walk to St. Martin's Lane, and then, lunch being imminent, and both of them very hungry, they forgot all about it.

Miss French had an appointment after lunch and went away early, leaving Mary alone. There was nobody in the clubrooms that she knew, and she sat down by a glowing fire to read the afternoon papers, fresh editions of which had just been brought in.

She read of the growing distress of the unemployed all over London. She saw that another Socialist had been elected to Parliament at a by-election – neither of which items of news interested her very much. Then she read with rather more interest, and a little shudder, that there had been a bomb explosion in Piccadilly only an hour or two ago, and that part of a great mansion belonging to the Duke of Paddington had been destroyed.

At five o'clock she went out again. The fog was worse than ever, but she knew her London well and was not afraid. She did some modest shopping, and then let herself into the house with her latch-key and went up-stairs.

Another day was over!

Another fruitless day was over, and the robin had not brought her luck after all!

As she opened her own door and felt for the little enamelled matchbox which always stood on a shelf beside it, her foot trod on something which crackled faintly.

Directly the gas was lit she saw that it was a telegram.

She opened it. It had been despatched from the Bedford Street office at two o'clock that afternoon – while she had been at the Actors' Association. It was from Seaton, the agent, and contained these words:

"Gentleman calling personally on you six to-night with important offer."

In wild excitement Mary looked at the clock. It was ten minutes to six. She lit the fire hurriedly, and urged it into flame with the bellows. Then she lit two candles on the mantelpiece to supplement the single gas jet, and drew the curtain over the window.

At six o'clock precisely she heard rapid steps, light, springy steps, coming up the stairs. There was a momentary hesitation, and then came two loud, firm knocks at her door. She opened it almost immediately, and then started in uncontrollable surprise.

The man who stood before her was the tall man with the mustard-coloured beard and the face pale as linen.

CHAPTER V

"TO INAUGURATE A REVOLUTION!"

The strange-looking man bowed.

"Miss Mary Marriott, I think!" he said.

"Yes," Mary answered. "Please come in. I have had a telegram from Mr. Seaton, the agent."

"Yes, he sent me here," said the tall man in a singularly fluid and musical voice.

"I had better tell you my name." He entered the room, closed the door, opened a silver cigarette case, and took a card from it which he handed to Mary. "There I am," he said with a smile that showed a set of gleaming white teeth and lit up the pallid face into an extraordinary vivacity.

Mary looked at the card. Then she knew who she was entertaining. On the card were these words: James Fabian Rose. The customary "Mr." was omitted, and there was no address in the corner.

Mary was a self-possessed girl enough, but she was unused to meeting famous people. She looked at the card, gave a little gasp, half of wonder and half of dismay, and then recollected herself.

"Please do sit down, Mr. Rose," she said, "and take off your overcoat – oh, and smoke, please, if you want to – I had no idea."

The tall man smiled. He seemed singularly pleased with the effect he had produced, almost childishly pleased. With a series of agile movements that had no break in them and seemed to be part of the continuous and automatic movement of a machine, he put his soft felt hat on the table, shed, rather than took off his overcoat, produced a box of wooden matches from somewhere, lit a cigarette, and sat down by the fire. He rubbed his hands together and said, "Yes, it is I, what a nice fire you've got" – all in one breath and in his rich, musical voice.

Mary sat down on the other side of the hearth, feeling rather as if she were in some fantastic dream. She said nothing, but looked at the man opposite, remembering all that she had heard of him.

About five-and-forty years of age, James Fabian Rose was one of the most noteworthy personalities of the day. He filled an immense place in the public eye, and it was almost impossible to open a newspaper without finding a paragraph or two about him on any given day. He was so well known that his whole name was seldom or never given in headlines. He was simply referred to as "J. F. R." and every one knew at once who was referred to.

His activities were enormous, and the three chief ones were Socialist leader, dramatist, and novelist. His socialistic lectures were always thronged by all classes of society. His problem plays – in which he always endeavoured to inculcate one or another of his odd but fervent beliefs – were huge successes with cultured people. His novels were only read by literary people, and then merely for their cleverness.

He was a man whom very few understood. He was, for one reason, far too clever to be credible with the popular mind; for, another, far too aware of his cleverness and far too fond of displaying it at inopportune moments. Fantastic paradox was his chief weapon, and many people did not realise his own point of view, which defined paradox as simply truth standing on its head to attract attention.

When he referred to his own novels, which he often did, he always rated them high above Balzac, Dickens, Thackeray, and Sir Walter Scott. When he spoke in public of his plays – no infrequent occurrence – it was generally with a word of pity for Shakespeare. He was the head of a large and enthusiastic following of intellectual people, and the anathema of all slow thinkers. Apropos of this last, he would quote Swift's saying that the appearance of a man of genius in the world may always be known by the virulence of dunces.

Beneath all his extravagances and pose – and their name was legion – his whole life and earnestness were devoted to the cause in which he believed. One of the most unconventional, and, at the same time, one of the most prominent men of his day, he had two real passions.

One was to shock the obese-brained of this world, the other to do all he could to leave the world better than he found it.

This was the extraordinary person, genius and buffoon, reformer and wit, who sat laughing on one side of Mary Marriott's little fire.

"I've surprised you, Miss Marriott!" said Mr. James Fabian Rose.

"I saw you at the agent's this morning," she answered, and then – "I think I am not mistaken – I saw you at the theatre at Swindon a few weeks ago."

"Yes, I was there with Peter Conrad, the parson," said Mr. Rose. "I'd been addressing a meeting of the Great Western Railway Company's men in the afternoon – the younger men – trying to teach them that the youth of a nation are the trustees of posterity, and in the evening I came to the theatre. That's why I'm here."

Mary said nothing. She waited for him to speak again, but her heart began to beat violently.

"I took away the programme," Rose went on, "and I put a mark against your name. I was quite delighted with your work, really delighted. I was in a fury at the crass stupidity of the play, and as for the rest of the company they bore about the same relation to real artists as the pawnbroker does to the banker. But you, my dear child, were very good indeed. I kept you in mind for a certain project of mine which was then maturing. It is now settled, and this morning I called at one or two agents to find out where you were. You were not on Blackdale's books, but I found you, or, rather, heard of you, at Seaton's, and so here I am."

"You want me to – "

"To act, of course. To become a leading lady in a West End theatre, in a new play. That's all!"

For a moment or two Mary could not speak. "But such a thing never happened before," she answered at length in a faltering voice. "It is – "

He cut her short. "My experience of the stage is at least twenty times more profound than yours," he said, "and I have known the thing happen six times within my own experience. Who found Dolores Rainforth? I did. Who found Beatrice Whittingham? – little wretch, she's deserted art and is making a squalid fortune in drawing-room comedy – I did! I could give you many more names. However, that's neither here nor there. I want you for a certain purpose. I know that if I searched the provinces all over I should not find any one who so exactly fits the leading part – my own conception of it! – in my new play as you do. Therefore you are coming to me. And the amusing part of it is that I have actually stormed the citadel of rank and fashion itself. I have gained a stronghold in the hostile country of the capitalists – in short, I and my friends have secured a lease of the Park Lane Theatre!"

Mary leant back in her chair. Her face had suddenly grown white. She was overwhelmed by all this. And, though she forgot this, her lunch had consisted of a cheap and not very succulent luxury known as a "Vienna steak," a not very nutritious mass of compressed mince-meat, but cheap, very cheap. It was now seven o'clock.

There were those who said that James Fabian Rose was a dreamer. People who knew him intimately were aware that if he was an idealist, he was also practical in the ordinary affairs of life.

"Now, I sha'n't tell you a word more," he said. "They're all waiting for you, and I promised to bring you for dinner. My wife was most insistent about it, and, besides, there are half a dozen people anxious to meet you. In absolute contradiction to all true socialistic principles I've been paying rent for a cab which has been standing outside your front door for ever so long. Put on your hat and come at once."

Mary sat up. "But I can't come like this," she said helplessly, "to dinner!"

Mr. Rose made a gesture of impatience. "The old stupid heresy of Carlyle," he said, "complicated by the fact that if a woman looks nice in one sort of costume she can't realise that she looks nice on whatever occasion she wears it. You must grow superior to such nonsense if we are to enlist you among us! But, come, you'll soon understand, and, besides, I know you are not really the ordinary fluffy little duffer one meets in the stage world."

She fell in with his humour and quickly pinned on her hat. She knew that she was on the threshold of stimulating experiences, that her chance had come, no matter how strange and fantastic the herald of its advent.

As Rose had said, a hansom was waiting. They got into it and trotted slowly away into the fog towards the great man's house at Westminster.

They arrived at last, though it was a somewhat perilous journey. More than once the driver descended from his seat, took one of the lamps from its bracket, and led his horse through this or that misty welter of traffic. Parliament Street was a broad hurly of confusion, but when they had passed the Abbey on the right and turned into the small network of quiet streets behind the Norman tomb of ancient kings, the house of the Socialist in Great College Street – that quiet and memorable backwater of London – was easily found.

Rose opened a big green door with his latch-key, and at once a genial yellow glow poured out and painted itself upon the curtain of the fog. Mary stood on the steps as a young woman of middle height, pretty and vivacious, came hurrying to the door. "My dear girl!" she cried, "so here you are! Fabian swore that he would find you and bring you. Come in quick out of the cold."

Then she stopped, still holding the door open – something was going on outside, the not infrequent altercation with the London cabman, Mary thought.

This is what she heard. "Don't be so foolish, my friend" – it was Rose's voice.

"Foolish!" said the cabman. "Bit of oil right ter call me foolish, I don't fink! Nah, I don't tyke no money from you, J. F. R., stryke me Turnham Green, if I do! I've 'eard you speak, I read your harticles, hi do, and it's a fair exchyng. In the dyes ter come no one won't pye anyfink for anyfink. The Styte'll do it all. I've your word for it. I'm a practical Socialist, I am. So long, and keep 'ammering awye at them as keeps the land from the rightful howners, wich is heverybody."

He cracked his whip and disappeared into the fog.

Mr. Rose came into the hall, shut the door, and looked at the half sovereign in his hand with a sigh. His manner seemed a little subdued.

"A little in advance of the future," he said in a meditative voice; "dear, good fellow! And now, Lucia, take Miss Marriott upstairs."

When her hostess took her into the drawing-room Mary found several people there. All of them seemed to expect her, she had the sense of that at once. Her welcome was singularly cordial, she was in some subtle way made to feel that she was somebody. She did not quite realise this at the moment because the whole thing was too sudden and exciting. She perceived it afterwards when she thought everything over.

The drawing-room on the first floor was large, low-ceilinged, and singularly beautiful. Mary had never seen such a room before. She had a sort of idea that Socialists liked to live in places like the hall of a workhouse, or the class-room of a board school – drab and whitewash places. She did not know till some time afterwards that the room she was in had been arranged and designed for the Roses by William Morris and Walter Crane themselves.

It was, in truth, a lovely room.

The walls were covered with brown paper for two-thirds of their height. A wooden beading painted white divided the warm and sober brown from a plain white frieze. All along one side of the room were shelves covered with gleaming pewter – an unusually fine collection. Here was a seventeenth-century bénitier from Flanders, there a set of "Tappit hens," found in a Scotch ale-house. There was a gleaming row of massive English plates of the Caroline period stamped with the crowned rose. The dull gleam, set thus against the brown background, was curiously effective, and the old Davenport and Mason china upon the white frieze above – deep blues, golds, and old cardinal reds, – the drawings by Walter Crane upon the walls, the tawny orange and reds of the Teheran carpets, and the open brick fire-place, all blended and refined themselves into a delightful harmony.

Besides the host and hostess three other people were present.

One of them was the Reverend Peter Conrad, the clergyman who had been with Rose in the box at the Swindon Theatre. Mary recognised him at once.

He was tall and thin with a clear-cut and somewhat ascetic face and a singularly humorous mouth. She had heard vaguely of him as a leader among that branch of the party which called itself, "Christian Socialistic," a large and growing group of earnest people, of all sects and shades of Christian opinion, representing every school of thought, but which, nevertheless, united in the endeavour to adapt the literal Socialistic teachings of the Sermon on the Mount to modern life. Christ, they said, was the Master Socialist, and all their aspirations and teachings were founded upon this axiom.

Sitting next to Mr. Conrad was a small, pale-faced man with a rather heavy light moustache and wearing gold-rimmed spectacles. He would have been almost insignificant in appearance had it not been for the high-domed forehead and fine cranial development. This was Charles Goodrick, the editor-in-chief of the great Radical daily paper – the most "advanced" of all the London journals, – and a man with great political influence.

The third man, Aubrey Flood, Mary recognised at once. He was a young and enthusiastic actor-manager, possessed of large private means, who was in the forefront of the modern movement for the reformation of the stage. He was at the head of the band of enthusiasts who were sworn foes of musical comedy and futile melodrama, and he enjoyed a definite place and *cachet* in society.

When they all went in to dinner, which they did almost at once, Mary found that he was seated at her left. On her right was Mr. Rose himself.

The meal was quite simple, but exquisitely served and cooked. The consommé would not have disgraced Vatel or Carême, the omelette was light as a feather, and, above all, hot! The wild ducks had been properly basted with port wine and stuffed with minced chestnuts and ham. To poor Mary it was a banquet for the gods!

"You see, Miss Marriott," said Rose, with a queer little twinkle in his eye, "we don't eat out of a common trough, though we are Socialists, nor are we vegetarians, as poor, dear Bernard Shaw would like us all to be."

Mary laughed. "I don't think I ever imagined Socialists were like that," she said. "In fact, though it may seem very terrible, I must confess that my mind has hitherto been quite a blank upon the subject."

"Then it will be all the easier to write the truth upon it," Rose answered.

"Then Miss Marriott doesn't quite know what we want her for yet?" Aubrey Flood asked.

"She only knows that she is going to play lead at the Park Lane Theatre in a new play of mine."

"And that is overwhelming, simply," Mary said with a blush. "It's impossible to believe. But, all the same, I am longing to hear all there is for me to know."

"So you shall after dinner," said Rose, "you shall have full details. Meanwhile, to sum the whole thing up, you are not only going to take a part in a play, but you are going to inaugurate a Revolution!"

CHAPTER VI

THE GREAT NEW PLAN

"J. F. R." had spoken with unusual seriousness, and his manner was reflected in the faces of the other guests as they looked towards Mary Marriott.

The girl's brain reeled at the words. A Revolution! What could they mean – what did it all mean? Was she not in truth asleep in her dingy little attic sitting-room? Wouldn't she wake up soon to find the old familiar things around her – all these new surroundings but a dream, a phantom of the imagination?

Mrs. Rose was watching her, and guessed something of what was passing in the girl's mind. "My dear," she said, with a bright and friendly smile, "it's all right; you really are wide awake, and you shall hear all about it from Fabian in a few minutes. And you haven't come into a den of anarchists, so don't be afraid. Only your chance has come at last, and you are to have the opportunity of doing a great, artistic thing – as great, perhaps, as any actress has ever done – and also of helping England. You may make history! Who knows?"

"Who knows, indeed?" said Charles Goodrick, the editor of the *Daily Wire*. "I hope it will be my privilege to record it in the columns of my paper."

The dinner was nearly over, but the remainder of it seemed interminably long to the waiting girl. In a swift moment, as it were, her whole life was changed. That morning she was a poor and almost friendless actress of the rank and file. Now she sat at dinner with a group of influential people whose names were known far and wide, whose influence was a real force in public affairs. And, somehow or other, they wanted her. She was an honoured guest. She was made to feel, and in a half-frightened way she did feel, that much depended upon her. What it was she did not know and could not guess; but the fact remained, and the consciousness of it was a strange mingling of exaltation, wonder, and fear.

At last Mrs. Rose smiled and nodded at Mary and rose from her seat.

"Don't be more than five minutes, Fabian," the hostess said, as she and Mary left the room.

When they were alone together she drew the girl to a big couch, covered with blue linen, and kissed her.

"We are to be friends," she said, "I am quite certain of it." And the lonely girl's heart went out to this winning and gracious young matron.

The four men came into the room, a maid brought coffee, cigarettes were lighted – Mrs. Rose smoked, but Mary did not – and the playwright took up a commanding position upon the hearth-rug.

Then he began. The mockery which was so frequent a feature of his talk was gone. He permitted himself neither pose nor paradox – he was in deadly earnest.

"For more than a year," he said, "I have searched in vain for an actress who could fill the chief woman's part in my new play. None of the ladies who have acted in my other plays would do. They were admirable in those plays, but this is quite different. I have never written anything like it before. I sincerely believe, and so do those who are associated with me in its production" – he looked over at Aubrey Flood – "that the play is a great work of art. But it is designed to be more, far more than that. It is designed to be a lever, a huge force in helping on the cause in which I believe and to which I have devoted my life – the cause of Socialism. I could not find any one capable of playing Helena Hardy, the heroine of the play. The play stands alone; yet is like no other play; no actress trained in the usual way, and however clever an artist, had the right personality. Then I saw you play. I knew at once, Miss Marriott, that I had found the lady for whom I was searching. Chance or Fate had thrown you in my way. In every detail you visualized my Helena Hardy for me. I am never mistaken. I was, and am, quite certain of it.

"You tell me you know nothing of Socialism. Before you have been associated with us very long you will know a great deal about it. I am sure, if I read you rightly, that when the time comes for you to play Helena you will be convinced of the truth of the words you utter, of the Cause for the service of which we enlist your art. It is the cause of humanity, of brotherhood, of freedom.

"We cannot go on as we are. These things have not touched your young life as yet, they are about to do so. Realise, to begin with, that England cannot continue as she is at present. Nemesis is one of the grim realities not sufficiently taken into account in the great game of life. Leaden-footed she may be, and often is, but that is only her merciful way of giving the sinner time to repent. There is nothing more certain in the universe than that an injustice done to an individual or to a class, to a nation or to a sex, will sooner or later bring destruction upon the doer. At the present moment England is reproducing every cause which led to the downfall of the great nations of the past – Imperialism, taking tribute from conquered races, the accumulation of great fortunes, the development of a huge population which owns no property and is always in poverty. Land has gone out of cultivation, and physical deterioration is an alarming fact. And so we Socialists say that the system which is producing these results must not be allowed to continue. A system which has robbed Religion of its message, destroyed handicraft, which awards the prizes and successes of life to the unscrupulous, corrupts the press, turns pure women into the streets and upright men into mean-spirited time-servers, must not continue.

"I'm not going to give you a lecture on Socialism now. But it is absolutely necessary that I should explain to you, at the very beginning of your work, how we look at these things.

"At the present moment three quarters at least of the whole population are called 'workers.' How do these people live? By the wear of hands and bodies, by the sweat of their faces. A 'worker' eats food which is rough, cheap, and harmful in many instances. His clothes are of shoddy, with a tendency to raggedness. He lodges in tiny, ill-ventilated rooms. He works from eight to sixteen hours each day, just so long as his strength is effective. And not only the worker himself – that is the man who is head and support of his family – but his wife and sisters and daughters share the burden of toil. He works among perils and dangers unceasing, accidents with machinery, explosions in mills and mines, dreadful diseases come to him from dangerous trades – unwholesome conditions, vitiated air, poisonous processes, and improper housing. Hardly any of those fortunate ones who impose these tasks upon him take any care to shield him from these evils. He is not so valuable as a horse. He is cheap, there are millions of him to be had, why go to the expense of protecting him? A horse has to be bought, he costs an initial sum down, the worker costs nothing but his wretched keep.

"You, Miss Marriott, are cultured. You are an artist, you live for your art, and you care for it. You can understand the peculiar horror, I should say one peculiar horror, of the life of the worker which he is himself generally too blind and ignorant to understand. For he has no leisure to look about him, no heart to speculate as to what things might be. Over all his misery and misfortune towers one supreme misery and misfortune – the want of all that makes the pleasure and interest of life to the free man. No genius tells stories, makes music, paints pictures, writes or acts, plays, builds palaces for the worker. Genius itself would starve at such work, as things are at present constituted. The workers' chief concern is to buy bread. He must let art, that sweetens life, go by. The Graces and the Muses are never shown to him in such a way that he may know and love them for their own sakes."

He stopped suddenly. Colour had come into the pallid face, the rich, musical voice had a vibrant organ note in it, every one in the room was leaning forward, strained to attention, Mary among the rest.

"So much for that," he went on. "I have been saying necessary but obvious things. Now let me point out what we are doing, we Socialists. Our party is growing enormously day by day. Innumerable adherents, great power, fill our ranks and give us weapons.

"We have an influential press. Monthly reviews and weekly papers preach our message. And one great daily journal, controlled by our brother, Charles Goodrick, reaches every class of society, and hammers in the truth day by day.

"Our political organization is an engine of great power. We have a large pledged party in the House of Commons. Our lecturers are everywhere, our books and pamphlets are being sown broadcast over the kingdom.

"We have a great Religious movement. Mr. Conrad here, together with some half a dozen others, controls the increasing band of Christian Socialists. Men and women of all the churches flock to his banner, differences of opinion are forgotten and lost under the one comprehensive watchword – that Christianity, the faith in Jesus Christ, is a socialistic religion.

"We have two great needs, however. Able as our writers are, they are nearly all essayists or journalists. As yet no great popular novelist has joined us – one of those supreme preachers who wield the magic wand of fiction and reach where no others can reach.

"And lastly, we have never had as yet a socialistic stage! That tremendous weapon, the theatre, has laid ready to our hand, but we have not availed ourselves of it. We are about to do so now. You know, I know, we are both experts, and it is our business to know, that there are hundreds of thousands of people who never read a book or pamphlet, and who are yet profoundly influenced and impressed by the mimic representations of life which they see upon the stage.

"You are a provincial actress. You have toured in ordinary melodrama. When, after some important act or scene, the characters are called before the curtain, what do you find? You find that some stick of a girl who has walked through the part of the heroine in a simper and a yellow wig is rapturously applauded – not for herself, the public thinks nothing of her acting one way or the other, but for the virtues of which she is the silly and inartistic symbol. The bad woman of the piece, always and invariably the finer player and more experienced artist, is hissed with genuine virulence.

"What is this but the very strongest proof – and there are dozens of other proofs if such were wanting – of the influence, the real and deep influence of the theatre upon the ordinary man and woman?

"It is to inaugurate the new use to which the theatre is going to be put by us that I have invited you to join us. But do not mistake me. We have taken the Park Lane Theatre by design. We are going to begin by showing the idle classes themselves the truth about themselves and their poorer brethren. They will come out of curiosity in the first instance, and afterwards because what we are going to give them is so unique, so extraordinary, and so artistically fine that they will be absolutely unable to neglect it. Then the movement will spread. We shall rouse the workers by this play, and others like it, in theatres which they can afford to attend. We shall have companies on tour – I may tell you that already a vast and detailed scheme is prepared, though I need not go into any of the details of that on this first night.

"And now, finally, let me tell you, quite briefly and without going into the scope of the plot, something about the first play of all at the Park Lane Theatre – your play, the play in which you are to create Helena Hardy. It is called, at present, *The Socialist*, and it is destined to be the first of a series. Its primary effort, in the carefully-thought-out scheme of theatre propaganda, is to draw a lurid picture of the extreme and awful contrast between the lives of the poor and the rich.

"We are going to do what has never been really done before – we are going to be extraordinarily and mercilessly realistic. It will be called brutal. And our studies are going to be made at first hand. In attacking one class, we are also going to allow it to be known that all our actual scenes have been taken from life. The slums to the north of Oxford Street, all round Paddington, are hideous and dreadful. They all belong to one man, the young Duke of Paddington, a boy at Oxford; incredibly rich. The theatre itself is on his land. Well, we are going to go for this young man tooth and nail, hammer and tongs, because he is typical of the class we wish to destroy. We are going to let it be generally known that this is our object. It will be published abroad that the slum scenes in the play are literal reproductions of actual scenes on the duke's property. Our scene painters are even now at work taking notes. One by one all the members of the cast are going to be taken to see these actual slums, to converse with their inhabitants, to imbibe the frightful atmosphere of these modern infernos. We

want every one to play with absolute conviction. I have arranged that a party shall leave this house in two days' time, a county council inspector and a couple of police inspectors are coming with us, in order to do this. You, I beg, Miss Marriott, will come, too."

He had been speaking for a considerable time with enormous earnestness and vivacity. Now he stopped suddenly and sank into a chair. His face became pale again, he was manifestly tired.

Some one passed him a box of cigarettes. He lit one, inhaled the smoke in a few deep breaths, and then turned to Mary.

"Well?" he said.

She answered him as simply, and many words would not have made her answer more satisfying or sincere.

"Yes," she said.

"Very well, then, that's settled," Rose replied in his ordinary voice. "Salary and that sort of thing we will arrange to-morrow through Mr. Seaton. I will merely assure you that we regard the labourer as worthy of his hire, and that we shall not disagree upon that sort of thing."

As he spoke a maid entered the room. "Mr. Goodrick is being rung up from the offices of the *Daily Wire*," she said.

"Then there is something important," said the journalist, as he hurried to the telephone in an adjacent room. "When I left at five I said that I should not return to-night unless it was anything big. I left Bennett in sole charge."

He was away some minutes, and the conversation in the drawing-room became general, the high note being dropped by mutual consent.

"By the way," Mr. Conrad said suddenly, "what an odd thing it is that part of Paddington House was blown down this morning!"

"The poor boy will have to take arms against a sea of troubles," said Mrs. Rose sympathetically. "At any rate, we are law-abiding conspirators. It seems dreadful to think that there are people who will go these lengths. I'm sorry for the poor young duke. It isn't his fault that he's who and what he is."

"Of course," Rose replied. "I hate and deprecate this violence. It is, of course, a menace from the unemployed. But my heart bleeds for them. Think of them crouching in doorways, with no shirts below their ragged coats, with no food in their stomachs, on a night like this!"

He shuddered, and Mary saw, with surprise, another and almost neurotic facet of this extraordinary character.

Charles Goodrick hurried into the room. "I must say good-night," he said, in a voice which trembled with excitement. "A very big piece of news has come in. One of our men has all the details. It will be our particular scoop. No other paper to-morrow morning will have all that we shall."

"But what is it?" Rose asked.

"A big railway accident, but with an extraordinary complication, and – by Jove, what a coincidence! – it concerns the young Duke of Paddington!"

"Is he killed?"

"No. He was stunned for a time. The accident happened in the fog just outside Paddington Station. He was stunned, but soon recovered.

"Then what?" said the journalist.

"Why, the extraordinary thing is that he has totally disappeared!"

CHAPTER VII

KIDNAPPING UPON SCIENTIFIC PRINCIPLES

The Duke of Paddington lay stunned and unconscious beneath the wreck of the first-class carriage.

There had been the period of waiting outside Paddington Station – his own great-grandfather had sold the ground on which it stood to the company – in the black fog of the winter's night.

Then there had come the lengthening roar of the approaching train, the shouts, the horrid crash of impact, the long tearing, ripping, grinding noise – and oblivion.

How long he had been unconscious the duke did not in the least know. He came back to life with that curious growing, widening sensation that a diver has when he is once more springing up through the water towards the surface, air, and light.

Then quite suddenly full consciousness returned – rather, he arrived at full consciousness. Everything was dark, pitch dark. His ears were full of a horrid clamour. A heavy, suffocating weight was pressing upon him.

He lay perfectly still for some moments endeavouring to recollect where he was and what had happened. Finally he remembered and realised that he was actually – he himself – a victim of one of those terrible railway accidents of which he had read so often in the newspapers with a careless word of pity, or perhaps, no emotion at all.

Another train had crashed into the Oxford express in the fog.

The duke moved his right arm, and found he could do so freely, except above his body, where the heavy something which was lying upon him prevented its passage. He strove to dislodge the weight, but was utterly unable to do so. He was, in fact, pinned beneath a mass of woodwork, which, while not pressing on him with more than a little of its weight, nevertheless kept him rigid upon his back without possibility of movement. His left arm he could not move at all. Curiously enough, the sensation of fear was entirely absent.

"I am in a deuce of a tight place," he thought of himself, and thought about himself in a strangely detached fashion as if he was thinking of another person.

"I am in a deuce of a tight place. What is to be done?"

He tried once more to move the crushing roof. He might as well have tried to push down the Bank of England with an umbrella.

Next there came to him a sudden thought, a realisation that at least one thing was in his favour. As far as he knew he was perfectly unhurt. He felt fairly certain that no limbs were broken, and that he had no severe internal injury. He was cut and bruised, doubtless, and still giddy from the blow of the impact, but, save for this, there could be no doubt that he had been most mercifully preserved.

The air was full of confused noises, shouts, the roaring of escaped steam, cries of agony. The duke added his clamour to the rest. His voice was full and strong, and echoed and re-echoed in his ears.

Nothing happened, and now for the first time a sickening feeling of fear came to him and his cries sank into silence.

Almost immediately afterwards he heard a noise much nearer than before, much more distinct and individual. It was a crashing, regular noise, some one was working at the débris.

Once more he shouted, and this time an answering hail came to him.

"Is anyone there?"

"Yes," the duke called out. "I am pinned down here by a heavy mass of timber."

"Are you badly injured?"

"I don't think I'm much hurt, only it is impossible for me to move."

"Cheer up!" came back the voice. "We will soon have you out." And then the crashing, tearing noise went on with renewed vigour.

In a few minutes the duke found the pressure on his chest was much relieved and the noise grew infinitely louder. It was as though he was lying shut up in a box, at the sides of which half a dozen stalwart navvies were kicking. He thought that the drums of his ears were bursting. Then there was a chorus of shouts, a last tremble and heaving of the confining mass, a breath of cold reviving air, and strong hands withdrew him from his prison.

He was carried swiftly to the side of the line and laid down upon a pile of sacking. Immediately he became aware that soft, dexterous hands were feeling him all over, hands which seemed to be definite and separate organisms, so light and purposeful were they.

He realised that a doctor was examining him, and the light of a lantern which some one else was holding showed him that the surmise was correct. A tall young man with a pointed beard, in a long mackintosh, was bending over him.

"You are all right, thank goodness!" said the doctor. "You are not hurt a bit, only you have been stunned, and of course you are suffering from the shock. Now, you just lie here until I come to you again. You must stay still for half an hour. Drink this."

He held a little cup of brandy to the duke's mouth. The fiery liquid sent new life into the young man's veins. Everything became more real and actual to him. Before everything had been a little blurred, as the first image upon the lenses of field-glasses is blurred. Now, the duke seemed to have got the right focus.

"Now, mind, you are not to move at all till I come back," the doctor said. "You have got a warm coat, and I will put some of these sacks over you. You are not hurt, but if you move now until you are rested a little you may get a shock to the nerves, which will remain with you for a long time. Now I must go to attend to some of the poor chaps who want me far more than you do."

"Is it a bad smash?" the duke asked. They were the first words he had spoken.

"One of the worst smashes for many years," answered the doctor over his shoulder as he was hurrying away. "You may thank your Maker that you have been so mercifully preserved."

The duke lay where he was.

The brandy had revived him, and, to his surprise, he realised that, except for a more or less violent headache, he really felt as well as he had been when he first got into the train. He was not even aware of any bruises or contusions, save only that his left hand had been rather badly cut, and was covered with congealed blood.

He wondered exactly where he was, and he looked around him. The fog was still impenetrably dense, though it was illuminated here and there by glowing fires and moving torches – a strange Dantesque vision of moving forms and red light, dim and distorted, like some mysterious tragedy of the underworld.

Now and then some sharp and almost animal like cry of agony came to his ears, cutting through the gloom like a knife, horribly distressing to hear.

Nobody was immediately near him. He was outside the radius of the chief activities of the breakdown gang and the doctors. There was nothing for him to do but to wait where he was. The doctor would be certain not to forget him, and, besides, he had not the faintest notion in what direction to move in order to get away from all this horror.

So he lay still.

Presently the brandy, to which he was unaccustomed, began to work within him, and induced a languor and drowsiness. His heavy sable coat, all torn and soiled now, though it had cost him six hundred guineas less than a month before, kept his body warm, and, in addition to it, he was covered by sacking.

His mind wandered a little, and he was almost on the point of dropping to sleep when there was a sound as of approaching footsteps upon gravel or cinders. He heard a muttered and strangely husky

conversation, apparently between two people, a quick, furtive ripple of talk, and then something descended upon his mouth, something warm and firm – a man's hand.

In the dark he could see two figures about him. A man had stooped down and brought his hand silently down upon his mouth, so that he could not cry out. Another was bending towards him on the other side, and soon he felt that deft hands were going through his pockets. When the doctor had touched him he had felt nothing but surprise and wonder at the prehensile intelligence of the touch. Now he shuddered.

He began to struggle, but found himself by no means so strong as he had imagined that he was a quarter of an hour ago.

A harsh voice hissed in his ear: "Now, stow that, or I'll make you!"

In all his life the Duke of Paddington had never been spoken to in such a way, and, ill as he was, the imperious blood leapt to his brain, and he redoubled his exertions.

Suddenly he stopped with a low gurgle of anguish.

His ear had been seized between two bony knuckles and twisted round with a sharp jerk until the pain was frightful.

Then he lay still once more.

He realised what was happening. The accident to the train had occurred on that part of the line some little way out of the station, upon which all sorts of more or less slum houses debouch. Two of those modern brigands who infest London had come, attracted to this scene of suffering and tragedy by the hope of plunder – even as in the old days, after a battlefield, obscene and terrible creatures appeared in the night and nameless deeds were done.

They had his watch. Sir John Bennett had made it specially for him. It was one of those repeating watches with all sorts of costly additional improvements, which can do almost anything but talk.

He heard the man about him say: "This 'ere's a rich bloke, Sidney; but the ticker's no blooming use except for the case. The – fence wouldn't look at it. Too easy to identify. Ah, this 'ere's better!"

He had found the duke's sovereign purse.

Swiftly, and with the skill born of long practice, the man went through every pocket. When he found the little case of green crocodile skin, in which the duke carried paper money, his cards, and a letter or two, he gave a low whistle of delight.

The duke could hear the little crackle close to his ear as the man counted the five-pound notes.

Almost immediately after this there was a gasp of astonishment.

"Look 'ere!" the other man said, "it's the bloomin' Duke of Paddington himself!"

The duke started, and obviously his captors imagined that he was about to recommence his struggles, for there was a sharp tweak of his ear once more. After that he heard nothing.

The two men had joined heads over his body and were whispering eagerly to each other. It seemed an eternity while he was lying there with the heavy hand upon his mouth, breathing with difficulty through his nostrils, though, in actual point of fact, from first to last, the whole thing was of less than two minutes' duration.

The men seemed to have come to some sort of agreement.

They acted with neatness and precision. A filthy and evil-smelling handkerchief was suddenly rammed into the duke's mouth. Another bandaged his eyes before he realised what was happening, and two pair of stalwart arms had him up upon his feet, locked in the London policeman's grip, and half carried, half hustled right away from where he had been lying almost before he realised what was happening.

He heard the click of a gate or door. His feet had left the gravel or cinder upon which they had been walking and were now apparently shuffling over flagstones. Then, by an added chill to the cold air, and a certain echo in the footsteps, he knew that he was being pushed down some sort of alley or cul de sac.

He was twisted from left to right and from right to left with the greatest rapidity, and half the extraordinary journey was not completed before he had utterly lost all idea of his whereabouts.

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