

A Day at the Races

By Alice Mitchell

Chapter 1

"Our daughters, daughters will adore us! And they'll sing in grateful chorus, 'Well done, sister Suffragettes!'" The awful screech of women's voices rattled the window panes of my train as I travelled into London for a hard day's work as a bank clerk.

My journey was going very well that day until it was announced at King's Cross station that the train was to be delayed due to a Suffragette protest. I peered through the dusty glass of my carriage window and was greeted by the sight of at least 40 women marching along the platform, screaming the lyrics to their awful 'song', and waving white placards smeared with black paint that twisted into words such as: 'HisHerstory' or simply 'Votes for Women' or even 'The Government are Murdering Women'.

All of which I believe are ludicrous. Women are to stay at home and educate young girls in their duties to look after their husband in the future. They are to look after the house, prepare dinner for their own husband so that it is ready on their arrival home from a hard day's work.

Guards were wrestling the women to stop them from jumping onto the track, whilst trains screeched to a halt before they a hit protester. And, the most ridiculous thing I saw on this journey were the men, **men**, joining the marches. Two were from my very own place of work, campaigning for women to have the right to vote. Men are meant to be strong, not cave in at the slightest hint of a thought that what these deranged women wanted might be politically correct.

Chapter 2

After an exhausting journey to work, disrupted at every stage, I finally arrived outside my bank. I glanced at my pocket watch. 8:17. I was supposed to begin at 8:00 am, promptly. My colleagues gave me a sideways glance as I opened the doors to enter. My first destination was boss's office to explain my lateness.

"Good morning, Sir. I apologise profusely for my being seventeen minutes late," I exclaimed with shame.

"Yes, yes. Good evening. And what exactly is your reasoning?" he questioned with a hint of anger in his voice.

"The Suffragettes were protesting at every train station it seemed today. They delayed me massively!" I explained, apologetically.

"Hmmm..... Yes, it delayed a few of our men this morning. Also, did you happen to come into contact with Edward or George along your journey?" my boss sympathised.

"Ahh, Sir, that reminds me...They were part of one of the protesting marches that delayed myself and many others. Isn't it outrageous!? They are weak men, can they be called men. Helping women like that. Females have been the inferior since the beginning of time, not just in humans, but all mammals," I gushed, enthusiastically.

"Yes, Yes I quite agree. Women are only showing themselves up by these mad campaigns as part of these Suffragette movements. They seem to believe that if they act like stroppy four year olds that aren't allowed some boiled sweets or don't want to take their medicine, we will respect them more and trust them to have the responsibility of the vote! Outrageous, I say. OUTRAGEOUS!!!" he began to shout excitedly, as though he had given the matter much thought, which he probably had.

Chapter 3

CRASH! SMASH! Glass rained onto the pavement as the window two buildings along smashed. Once again, the Suffragettes could be seen and heard in protest. Why should they be allowed to vote? They would vote for

having all windows smashed, all women to be chained to the gates of parliament, or other ludicrous acts like that. The bank's security guard charged outside to close our shutters to protect us from a similar attack. During the time of closure, I checked the postbox. I unlocked the the box and peered inside, a sheet of paper looked back me. I gingerly removed it, wondering what it was. A leaflet. It was a suffragists leaflet, listing reasons why women should be able to vote. A much more civilised manner in which to protest and gain male trust and respect. Through literature; posters, leaflets, brochures, polite speeches, all explaining calmly why women should gain the right to vote. Non-violent protesting, I may be able to understand, and come to grips with, possibly, but the WSPU just don't prove themselves to me. They were begun by Emmeline Pankhurst as she thought that the NUWSS's protests weren't getting women anywhere in their quest for the vote, so she thought she would make female views more known. And back-track on all their hard work. Up until then, I was beginning to agree with the idea, after all, the Isle of Man granted women's suffrage in 1881. However, Pankhurst lost her gender all respect that I'd previously had for them, the trust gained from the NUWSS, and any hope of me agreeing to women having the right to vote.

"Arrowsmith! William Arrowsmith!" a voice called from inside the building. "Where are you?"

"Coming," I called back.

As I hurried towards the voice that called my name, I heard the distinct sound of smashing glass and screeching tram brakes. Again. During marches, women say that the government are murdering them, but from where I'm standing, they are murdering London and themselves.

Chapter 4

"Ahh...Good afternoon, William. Would you like to accompany me to a day at the races this weekend? The weather is set to be fine," my good friend Richard asked.

"Oh, yes, yes. That would be splendid my fellow, if the Suffragettes don't interrupt our jolly!" I joked. "I'll catch the train to Epsom Derby at meet you there? There are some fine horses set to race."

"Indeed, I read so in the newspaper. I'll shall see at Derby on Saturday then."

The shutters were open again when I returned to the counter. Outside a group of protesters were being ushered away by police. The regulars taken to the station into custody, some getting away with a warning that they no doubt wouldn't adhere to. The same faces were amongst them, being told off by stern faced policemen, like children misbehaving in the classroom.

But, but, who's that? I could have sworn I recognised that face, dark eyes like mum, dad's nose and ears, framed by mouse brown wavy hair. A warning letter in hand, 'Votes for Women' sash around her chest, my sister was a suffragette! Campaigning and protesting violently along the streets of London.

I marched purposefully outside, slamming the door behind me. I was stern-faced and I ignored the calls from behind, I'd explain later. I strode right into her path, she stopped dead. All of a sudden her face dropped, becoming an over ripe beetroot, tears pricked in her eyes.

"And **what** do you think you're doing?" I shouted, the anger bubbling in my throat. I paused, giving her time to configure a reasonable excuse, as she did when she was late home as a teenager and father was fuming at her.

"I-I-I want to vote!" she exclaimed suddenly empty of her previous shame.

"Why are you not at home, preparing supper, or looking after your children?" I asked in an attempt to make her embarrassed at being caught doing something she *knew* she wasn't supposed to be doing. It didn't work.

Another suffragette had come to back her up. It was pointless me doing anything, I shall simply write to father to explain, *he* can deal with it that way.

Chapter 5

As I saunter back inside, I get the look from my boss, time for some more explaining.

"Where did you think you were going?" demanded my boss.

"Well, you see, I recognised a suffragette to be my sister, and fuming with rage, out I marched to reprimand her her. I intended to explain on my return," I explained shiftily. To my great relief, a look of understanding came onto his face.

"Well, absolutely. It sounds like she needed a good ticking off. I had a similar situation with my daughter last week. Gave her a right verbal spanking, convinced her to switch to the suffragists, but couldn't get her to stop all together. At least she is politely protesting now. Speaking of that, have you collected the post today? She said that she would put a leaflet through," he said encouragingly.

"Yes, it is here. I collected it earlier," I said, producing it from my breast pocket. "Much more civilised!" "Absolutely, now back to work, you." he said finishing the conversation.

When I returned home, I set to work at my writing desk in the study. I got out my best ink pen, and a sheet of fine cartridge paper ready for a letter to my father. I began with his address, the same as when I had lived at home still, I knew it off by heart. I murmured it to myself as I wrote it out. I was writing by hand as father was more likely to read it that way rather than if it was typed on my typewriter. He believed a hand-written letter was more meaningful than a typed one. I began calmly, the pen gliding over the paper quite smoothly. However, it didn't stay like this for long. The average time between each dip in my ink well shortened, the pen started to scratch the paper's surface, the anger that was present in my original encounter with her had doubled. I was fuming. My letters were becoming deformed, I paused to read through what I had written. I stopped writing for a while to have some supper, I would finish afterwards.

Chapter 6

I had my letter clasped in my hand as I briskly strode to the train station. I pushed it into the bright red box on my way to buy my ticket to Derby. Soon Father would know all about what my scheming little sister had been doing, she would be punished, and would never know it was me who told him.

I boarded my train ready for a good old day at the races with an old pal. I pulled out the list of racing horses, considering who to put my money on. One of King George V's horses was set to race, among many others. Before long, I had arrived at my station for the racecourse and stepped off the train with a few other passengers. I stopped a taxi and asked for the racecourse. I left the cab after paying a rather extortionate fee for such a short journey, instantly deciding that I would walk on my return to save costs.

I met Richard at the betting office to place our bets on our chosen horses. We made our way to the viewing area, approximately 10 minutes before the race was set to begin. Richard produced a wicket basket filled with sandwiches, fruit and other snacks.

BANG! The starting gun had fired. Horse hooves pounded the hard ground like a hundred hammers hitting rocks. I caught my first sighting of a horse seconds later. I squinted to see which it was, my sight not being the best, I couldn't quite make it out. Richard clapped his hands on my shoulder.

"Your horse is winning. It's at the front!" he exclaimed proudly, as though it was his own horse.

Chapter 7

It didn't last long though, unfortunately. Soon the King's horse was ahead on the inside.

All of a sudden an urgent gasp rolled through the crowds. Jaws dropped, voices screamed.

And...

She jumped. Emily Davison had jumped onto the track.

It was as though from the first gasp, time had almost stopped, gone into slow motion. Yet as soon as she had jumped, time was racing faster than ever. A suffragette pin was in her hand. It was clear her intention. Jump in front of a racing horse, get killed, prove how much she wants to vote, not actually ever be able to vote (because she is dead), and make it all look like an accident, as though she merely wanted to put a pin on the King's horse to encourage him to agree with them and push the government into granting female suffrage.

"You said that they'd interrupt the day!" Richard grumbled.

"Well, it was a joke, but they always seem to ruin my good days," I said glumly. "Fancy a drink in the nearby public house?"

"Oh, go on then. A whisky wouldn't go a miss!" he said, a little more cheerfully now. "We could eat some of this too,"

He lifted the basket to indicate what he meant.

We went to the public house for a drink and chat about the day's events, sharing views that were much the same. I caught the train home after a rather drunken walk.

The next week saw some interesting headlines, varying in wording but amounting to the same thing: Emily Davison had died in her quest for women's rights. She was a martyr. This wasn't so bad, what annoyed me most was that the press were beginning to agree with campaigners. What has this world come to?

Chapter 8

Later that week, I received a letter from my father in the post. It explained that he didn't think it would be so bad if women got the vote. Well, in my opinion, it *would* be so bad. They are the inferior gender, who jump in front of horses when they don't get their own way instead of preparing dinner for the superior males.

My father also proposed a whole family supper the next weekend. This would include my newly revealed, campaign supporting mother, suffragette sister, and seemingly demented father. It looked as though I was the only straight-seeing person with a working brain in my family. Could they not see what was happening to society over these absurd protests?

It's clear the intention of this meal is to convince me it's actually quite good. Well, it isn't. Never has been. Never will be. Whoever even merely considered it should be put in a mental asylum.

Despite being against the subject of conversation at supper tomorrow evening, I shall be dressing with dignity, an outfit that will show my strength of mind and state clearly that my mind shan't change and that my opinions are strict. I was so convinced of this, I noted down arguments I could give to just about every point they might say, as though it was to be a debate or a parliamentary meeting. The list was of a fair length, it required 4 sheets of my best note paper.

The next evening I set off to my parents' house for a strong discussion over supper. All that I needed to be careful of was that my mother didn't get upset and cry as that was one of the only things that may hint that I should reconsider. Although, on second thoughts, maybe this matter was so severe that it wouldn't. No, I don't think my entire family creating a well of tears could win me over. Along my journey, I wondered whether my younger brother would be there, and if he was, what were his views?

Chapter 9

Whilst waiting for the bus to complete my journey, I picked up a newspaper. Yesterday, I had taken a day away from work for a little break to lengthen my weekend, so stayed at home and considered my list of arguments on both days. This also meant that I hadn't checked the papers or spoken to anyone. Living high on a hill, no one ever just happened to stop by either.

To my great disgust, women (under certain circumstances, that were yet to be decided) would soon be granted the right to vote. This would be completed in time for the next election, meaning that they too would decide how the country was run.

There is only one thought on my mind right now: All six ravens are about to leave the tower! And we all know that if all ravens from the Tower of London leave, the kingdom will fall...

Epilogue

To my great distaste, my brother *was* at supper, but not on my side. This made my job ten times harder, as I had four to convince, but four convincing me. Also, my brother thinks like me. Subsequently, he too had written a list of arguments against me.

I may as well admit this to you now, they convinced me it could be good.

This doesn't mean that I agree with their protests, or think they deserve more power. Simply that the vote should probably be a right for both women and men. It may do good things, I guess. However, if our kingdom falls, I will be the first to say, "I told you so,"