

CHAPTER 5

THE CRYSTAL PALACE

About 9 o'clock next morning Mr Salteena stood bag in hand in the ancestral hall waiting for the viacle to convey him to the station.

Bernard Clark and Ethel were seated side by side on a costly sofa gazing abstractly at the parting guest. Horace had dashed off to put on his cocked hat as he was going in the baroushe but Francis Minnit was roaming about the hall well prepared for any deed.

Well said Bernard puffing at his meershum pipe I hope you will get on Alf I am sure you have that little letter to old Clincham eh

In deed I have said Mr Salteena many thanks for the same and I do hope Ethel will behave properly.

Oh yes I expect she will said Bernard with a sigh.

I always do said Ethel in a snappy tone.

Just then there was a great clatter outside and the sound of hoofs and a loud neigh. The barouche I take it said Bernard rising slowly.

Quite correct sir said Minnit flinging wide the portles.

Well goodbye Alf old man said Bernard Clark good luck and God bless you he added in a pious tone.

Not at all said Mr Salteena I have enjoyed my stop which has been short and sweet well goodbye Ethel my child he said as bag in hand he proceeded to the door. Francis Minnit bowed low and handed a small parcel to Mr Salteena a few sandwiches for the journey sir he remarked.

Oh this is most kind said Mr Salteena.

Minnit closed his eyes with a tired smile. Not kind sir he muttered quite usual.

Oh really said Mr Salteena feeling rather flabbergasted well goodbye my good fellow and he slipped 2/6 into the butlers open palm.

Mr Salteena had to travel first class as active Horace ran on to buy the ticket which he presented with a low bow the Times and Tit-Bits. Oh many thanks my man said Mr Salteena in a most airy voice now will you find me a corner seat in the train eh.

If there is one sir replied Horace.

In got Mr Salteena to his first class carriage surrounded by his luggage carefully piled up by kindly Horace. The other passengers

looked full of envy at the curly white wig and green plush uniform of Horace. Mr Salteena crossed his legs in a lordly way and flung a fur rug over his knees though he was hot enough in all conscience. He began to feel this was the thin end of the partition and he smiled as he gently tapped the letter in his coat tail pocket. When Mr Salteena arrived in London he began to strolle up the principle streets thinking how gay all was. Presently he beheld a resturant with a big Menu outside and he went boldly in.

It was a sumpshous spot all done up in gold with plenty of looking glasses. Many hansom ladies and gentlemen were already partaking of choice food and rich wines and whiskey and the scene was most lively. Mr Salteena had a little whiskey to make him feel more at home. Then he eat some curry to the tune of a merry valse on the band. He beat time to the music and smiled kindly at the waiters and he felt very excited inside. I am seeing life with a vengeance he muttered to himself as he paid his bill at the desk. Outside Mr Salteena found a tall policeman. Could you direct me to the Crystale Pallace if you please said Mr Salteena nervously.

Well said the geniul policeman my advice would be to take a cab sir.

Oh would it said Mr Salteena then I will do so.

He hailed a Hansome and got speedily in to the Crystal Palace he cried gaily and holding his bag on his knees he prepared to enjoy the sights

of the Metropolis. It was a merry drive and all too soon the Palace heaved in view. Mr Salteena sprang out and paid the man and then he entered the wondrous edifice. His heart beat very fast as two huge men in gold braid flung open the doors. Inside was a lovely fountain in the middle and all round were little stalls where you could buy sweets and lemonade also scented handkerchiefs and many dainty articles. There were a lot of people but nobody very notable.

At last after buying two bottles of scented and some rather nice sweets which stuck to his teeth Mr Salteena beheld a wooden door on which was nailed a notice saying To the Private Compartments.

Ah ha said Mr Salteena to himself this is evidently my next move, and he gently pushed open the door straitening his top hat as he did so. Inside he found himself in a dimly lit passage with a thick and handsome carpet. Mr Salteena gazed round and beheld in the gloom a very superior gentleman in full evening dress who was reading a newspaper and warming his hands on the hot water pipes. Mr Salteena advanced on tiptoe and coughed gently as so far the gentleman had paid no attention. However at the second cough he raised his eyes in a weary fashion. do you want anything he asked in a most noble voice.

Mr Salteena got very flustered. Well I am seeking the Earl of Clincham he began in a tremulous voice are you by any chance him he added most respectfully.

No not exactly replied the other my name happens to be Edward Procurio. I am half Italian and I am the Groom of the Chambers.

What chambers asked Mr Salteena blinking his eyes.

These said Edward Procurio waving a thin arm.

Mr Salteena then noticed several red doors with names of people on each one. Oh I see he said then perhaps you can tell me where the Earl of Clincham is to be found.

At the end of the passage fourth door down said Procurio tritely of course he may be out one never knows what they are up to.

I suppose not said Mr Salteena in an interested tone.

One can not gamble on anything really said Procurio returning to the hot water pipes though of course I know a lot more than most people about the inmates here.

What are the habits of the Earl of Clincham said Mr Salteena.

Procurio gave a smile many and various he replied I can't say much in my position but one lives and learns. He heaved a sigh and shrugged his shoulders.

Well good day said Mr Salteena feeling better for the chat.

Procurio nodded in silence as Mr Salteena trotted off down the passage. At last he came to a door labelled Clincham Earl of in big letters. With a beating heart Mr Salteena pulled the bell and the door swung open of its own accord. At the same moment a cheery voice rang out from the distance. Come in please I am in the study first door on left.

With a nervous bound Mr Salteena obeyed these directions and found himself in a small but handsome compartment done in dark green leather with crests on the chairs. Over the mantelpiece was hung the painting of a lady in a low neck looking quite the thing. By the desk was seated a tall man of 35 with very nice eyes of a twinkly nature and curly hair he wore a quite plain suit of palest grey but well made and on the table reposed a grey top hat which had evidently been on his head recently. He had a rose in his button hole also a signet ring.

Hullo said this pleasant fellow as Mr. Salteena was spell bound on mat.

Hullo your Lord Ship responded our hero bowing low and dropping his top hat do I adress the Earl of Clincham.

You do said the Earl with a homely smile and who do I adress eh.

Our hero bowed again Alfred Salteena he said in deep tones.

Oh I see said the kindly earl well come in my man and tell me who you are.

Mr Salteena seated himself gingerly on the edge of a crested chair.

To tell you the truth my Lord I am not anyone of import and I am not a gentleman as they say he ended getting very red and hot.

Have some whiskey said lord Clincham and he poured the liquid into a glass at his elbow. Mr. Salteena lapped it up thankfully.

Well my man said the good natured earl what I say is what dose it matter we cant all be of the Blood royal can we.

No said Mr Salteena but I suppose you are.

Lord Clincham waved a careless hand. A small portion flows in my viens he said but it dose not worry me at all and after all he added piously at the Day of Judgement what will be the odds.

Mr Salteena heaved a sigh. I was thinking of this world he said.

Oh I see said the Earl but my own idear is that these things are as

piffle before the wind.

Not being an earl I cant say answered our hero but may I beg you to read this letter my Lord. He produced Bernards note from his coat tails. The Earl of Clincham took it in his long fingers. This is what he read.

My dear Clincham

The bearer of this letter is an old friend of mine not quite the right side of the blanket as they say in fact he is the son of a first rate butcher but his mother was a decent family called Hyssopps of the Glen so you see he is not so bad and is desirous of being the correct article. Could you rub him up a bit in Socierty ways. I dont know much details about him but no doubt he will supply all you need. I am keeping well and hope you are. I must run up to the Compartments one day and look you up.

Yours as ever your faithfull friend

Bernard Clark.

The Earl gave a slight cough and gazed at Mr Salteena thoughtfully.

Have you much money he asked and are you prepared to spend a good deal.

Oh yes quite gasped Mr Salteena I have plenty in the bank and £10 in ready gold in my purse.

You see these compartments are the haunts of the Aristocracy said the earl and they are kept going by people who have got something funny in their family and who want to be less mere if you can comprehend.

Indeed I can said Mr Salteena.

Personally I am a bit parshial to mere people said his Lordship but the point is that we charge a goodly sum for our training here but however if you cant pay you need not join.

I can and will proclaimed Mr Salteena and he placed a £10 note on the desk. His Lordship slipped it in his trouser pocket. It will be £42 before I have done with you he said but you can pay me here and there as convenient.

Oh thankyou cried Mr Salteena.

Not at all said the Earl and now to bissness. While here you will live in compartments in the basement known as Lower Range. You will get many hints from the Groom of the Chambers as to clothes and ettiquett to menials. You will mix with me for grammer and I might take you out hunting or shooting sometimes to give you a few tips. Also I have lots of ladies partys which you will attend occasionally.

Mr Salteenas eyes flashed with excitement. I shall enjoy that he cried.

His Lordship coughed loudly. You may not marry while under instruction he said firmly.

Oh I shall not need to thankyou said Mr Salteena.

You must also decide on a profeshion said his Lordship as your instruction will vary according.

Could I be anything at Buckingham Pallace said Mr Salteena with flashing eyes.

Oh well I dont quite know said the noble earl but you might perhaps gallopp beside the royal baroushe if you care to try.

Oh indeed I should cried Mr Salteena I am very fond of fresh air and royalties.

Well said the earl with a knowing smile I might arrange it with the prince of Wales who I am rrather intimate with.

Not really gasped Mr Salteena.

Dear me yes remarked the earl carelessly and if we decide for you to gallopp by the royal viacle you must be mesured for some plush knickerbockers at once.

Mr Salteena glanced at his rrather fat legs and sighed.

Well I must go out now and call on a few Dowigers said his Lordship picking up his elegant top hat. Well au revoir he added with a good french accent.

Adieu my Lord cried Mr Salteena not to be out done we meet anon I take it.

Not till tomorrow answered the earl you will now proceed to the lower regions where you will no doubt find tea. He nodded kindly and glided out in silence.

Here I will end my chapter.