# As the Night Ends

## Audrey Howard

### 1

He first saw her in what the police would describe as a 'scuffle' but it proved to be more than a scuffle and it was the noise of it, the screaming, the shouting, the yelling, floating over the water, that drew him to it.

It was the beginning of June. He had intended crossing Westminster Bridge and strolling along Bridge Street, down Millbank, turning at Dean Stanley Street and into Smith Square where he had rooms. After the distressing surgery he had performed that morning he felt an even greater need than usual to clear his head of the sights and sounds and smells of the accident ward and the operating theatre where he had been working since seven.

When he had left St Thomas's, nodding to the porter at the main entrance, stepping out into the pleasant June sunshine, there were comparatively few people about though it was almost noon. He had been looking forward to this, his afternoon off, glad to be away from the despair of the mother whose child, a boy of seven, had lost his leg. He himself had amputated it after he and Dick Morris had done their desperate best to put together the smashed limb, crushed beneath the wheel of a horse-drawn cab under which the child had fallen. It had been hopeless and they had had no choice but to take it off just above the knee, condemning the lad to the life of a cripple. A prosthetic limb would be fitted, of course, but the boy, who was a keen footballer, his broken-hearted mother kept repeating, would be maimed for ever.

St Thomas's was by far the largest 'pavilion-plan' general hospital, with beds for over 600 patients, one of the most modern and hygienic in London and the boy had been fortunate – if such a word could be used in the dreadful circumstances – to have been brought into its care. The wards were large and airy, replacing the small rooms that had once been usual, for then they had believed that large wards produced disease because of the sheer numbers of sick gathered in one place. Now the long wards contained beds placed in two rows with the heads against the wall. When the hospital had been built six adjacent ward pavilions had been provided with plenty of space between each one. There were bathrooms and lavatories, sculleries and closets on each ward with a ventilated lobby separating the wards from the sanitary facilities to prevent smells from entering the ward. There was ample space around each bed to allow for the presence of students and the requirements of clinical teaching. It was here that he himself had been first a student, where he had qualified and now after many years' training was, despite his comparative youth, a surgeon, and it was in one of the immaculate beds that the boy lay, still unconscious, his distraught mother beside him, for he had given instructions to the tight-lipped sister on duty that she was to be with her son when he awoke.


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He walked the length of the Albert Embankment towards Westminster Bridge, trying to identify the noises he heard, which appeared to come from somewhere in the vicinity of Westminster Yard, at the same time breathing in the scent and the sight of the deep pink begonias which provided bold splashes of colour among the white of the allysum and the blue lobelia in the hospital gardens that lined the Thames. The contrast between them and what he had seen and done this morning could not have been stronger and he wondered if he would ever become immune to the suffering of the humanity he served. Perhaps that sounded pompous, he brooded, or even priggish, as though he were the only surgeon to care for those who were brought to him to be mended, but he sometimes wished he could develop the dispassion of others in his profession.

The old man who cared for the gardens leaned on his hoe for a moment, lifting his cap and wiping his forehead with the back of his hand.

'Mornin', Doctor,' he said in his nasal Cockney. 'Nice day fer it.'

'It is indeed, Jack.'

'Dunno what's goin' on over there,' nodding in the direction of the Houses of Parliament. 'P'raps them 'oo works there is hengaged in fisticuffs. Wouldn't put it past them.'

'You could be right.'

With a smile he continued towards the bridge. When he reached the end of the walkway an old derelict sprawled by the public urinals held out a grimy hand and whined for 'tuppence fer a cuppa, yer Lordship,' and putting his hand in his pocket he withdrew some coppers and threw them into the old chap's cap.

'Thanks, guvner.'

It was then he noticed that the previously quiet bridge was becoming crowded with people who were in distinct danger of being run down by horse-drawn vehicles and the occasional motor car which puttered along the road. They were mostly men, hurrying across the river towards the Houses of Parliament, and they appeared to be excited about something. Although he had intended a pleasant stroll in the sunshine towards his rooms overlooking the lovely old church of St John, he found himself swept along in the sudden surge of yelling, fist-waving men.

Coming off the bridge and moving with the crowd along Bridge Street, since he had no option but to go with it, he turned the corner into Parliament Square as they did and was appalled, for the area of Westminster Yard was boiling like the scene of a revolution. Mounted police were laying about them with stout batons, striking anyone who got in their way. Foot policemen were doing their best to seal the area in front of the statue and several prison vans were drawn up with the doors open and uniformed constables on the steps. Hordes of women swept in from the far side of the square and he was forced back against the railings to which he clung for dear life lest he be dragged underfoot.


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'It's them bloody suffragettes,' the man who was crammed against him shouted in his ear. 'Bloody whores, the lot of 'em. Should be whipped ...' The man's voice was carried away as he fought to get to the heart of the riot where scores of women, mostly well-dressed ladies, were grappling with as many police and plainclothes men. Fists were flailing, hats and umbrellas and dainty parasols were flying, police helmets rolling on the ground beneath the hooves of the horses, along with women who had fallen, or been shoved in a flurry of white petticoats. Women were being propelled up the steps of the Black Maria, punched and even kicked by a man in a straw boater, his nose streaming with blood, his face a mask of fury. The van was already full but the man, whoever he was, seemed determined to push in more dishevelled women like pickles in a barrel, women with torn clothing, women with blood on their faces, their hats lost, their hair straggling down their backs. Other females were dragged from the crowd, thrown from one demented man to another, each laid into by their fists, some seized by the coat collar and pushed helplessly into a side street where severe beatings were taking place. 'I'll teach you a lesson,' one incensed man was shrieking as he struck again and again, his fists bloody. It was not his own blood! 'I'll teach you a lesson you'll never forget so that you'll not come back again.' A young chap in a cap and no collar was bashing an elderly woman against a lamppost, hitting the post with the point of her jaw, beating, punching with such demented fury one wondered what was in his mind except an intention to terrorise and intimidate. Or perhaps just like some men in the crowd he had never had the chance to brutalise a woman without retribution and here was the perfect opportunity.

He had become trapped against the railings, pinioned by the mass of struggling humanity, aghast at the brutishness of the scene and it was then, as a gap suddenly appeared in the crowd, that he saw her. Two uniformed policemen had her, one to each arm, while a third walking behind passed his arms about her body as they frog-marched her towards the steps of the van, her booted toes scraping the cobbles. Her skirt had been lifted almost to her waist, showing her pretty lace-trimmed drawers but more horrific was the grinning policeman's hand which had torn down her blouse and underwear to reveal one perfect white breast and a pink nipple as sweet and ripe as a cherry. His hand fondled it as her mouth opened on a silent scream: of terror, the watching man thought, then he realised that it was not terror but defiance that creased her lovely face into a snarl. Her hair was a tumbled mass of dark and glossy curls and her eyes which glared out at the world were the most incredible blue, bluer than the bluebells in the woods of Old Swan where he had played as a lad, bluer than the summer sky, and yet with a clear brilliance. Quite extraordinary, he remembered thinking, not just their colour but his own strangeness in noticing them at a moment such as this. Her head turned frantically and she seemed to stare directly into his face, her own still contorted, whatever she was shouting unheard in the baying of the crowd. The top of her head barely reached the shoulders of the three tall constables who hustled her towards the van. Her feet left the ground completely at that point and she was thrown like a sack of potatoes into the second van, gathered up by those already packed into it. Trampled underfoot were torn banners on which were written, 'Votes for Women'.

It took an hour to clear the square, not just of screaming women who had come to demand their rights but of infuriated men who had come to see them refused. A


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couple of policemen stood where the vans had been, looking so ordinary, so amiable, so completely the British 'bobby' it was hard to believe that an hour ago he had seen them abusing women in the most indecent manner imaginable.

'Where will they take them?' he asked one abruptly, for though he did not approve of the women's militancy neither could he approve of the way they had been manhandled.

'Sir?' the policeman queried politely.

'Those women.'

'Bow Street Magistrates' Court, sir. They'll be busy there tomorrow.'

'Oh, yes?'

'Aye, over a hundred of 'em at my reckoning an' some gents an' all. Can yer believe it? Holloway's gonner be a bit packed fer some time ter come. P'raps they'll keep their gobs shut from now on.'

He recognised her at once as she was hustled in to the dock alongside a dozen other women. She still wore no hat but some time during the night she had managed to sew up the rent in her blouse and her hair had been bundled into a tangled knot on the top of her head. It was far from tidy, curls falling in wayward knots about her ears, across her forehead and from her hairline at the back of her neck. In repose she was lovely, serene even and he found it hard to associate this composed figure with the virago she had been the day before. She sat with several of her companions on the bench awaiting her turn, not leaning forward with her arms on the rail that surrounded the dock as the others were, their chins in their hands as they listened to Christabel Pankhurst address the court, but settling back calmly as though this had really nothing to do with her.

But he knew, just as if her thoughts had taken wing and roosted in his own mind, that she was inwardly seething and that the moment she was called she would turn back into the violent creature who had defied authority the day before. Christabel Pankhurst was a brilliant orator and for several minutes, though they did their best to stop her, she ranted on in the manner he and the rest of the male population had heard or read of in the newspapers and he barely listened. His whole attention was riveted on the young woman waiting her turn. The court dealt with Christabel and two other women who refused to pay their fines and were sentenced to various prison terms depending on their previous records, and then it was her turn.

She began at once. 'For ten years, no, that is not correct, for more than fifty years we women have fought to have equality with men. At first we campaigned peacefully, lobbying for support from MPs but forty years of this approach has not persuaded ...'


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'Oh, put a bloody sock in it,' a male voice from the body of the court shouted, 'we've heard enough from the other one ...' but she continued as if he had not spoken.

'...to take the demand seriously. We have been treated with ridicule whenever it was raised in Parliament. Women of this land ...'

'Madam, we are not here to listen to you lecturing us, so be quiet.' This from the judge himself. 'We have heard enough from the other one.'

Again she went on regardless. '... indeed the world over must secure for themselves a parliamentary vote, as it is granted to men. Mr Asquith dismisses us as a small problem but believe me he is making a mistake. So I refuse to recognise the proceedings of this court ...'

She did her best to make herself heard above the catcalls and jeering but a well-dressed elderly gentleman several rows in front of him stood up and, interrupting her, begged permission to address the bench. The bench looked astonished but then what else could you expect from these women and their followers.

'No, Father, no,' the woman began to shriek. 'You must not interfere. I know what you're going to do and I won't have it. I shall serve my sentence with the others as I am entitled to do and I won't allow you to ...'

The hubbub that erupted drowned what she was trying to express, for it seemed every man in the court had something to say on the matter. Most in loud, angry voices but the elderly gentleman ignored her, and them, continuing to speak to the judge with great courtesy.

She would have leaped over the rail had not two policemen grabbed her by the arms, holding her in much the same manner as those of yesterday. He himself had stood up with the rest of those in the court and with a total disregard for the men hooting and hissing about him began to elbow his way towards the dock. The judge banged his gavel and at last the elderly gentleman made himself heard.

'Your Honour, this is my daughter you see before you and I am here to claim a father's rights to pay the fine, whatever it may be, and take her home.'

'No, you have no right, Father, none at all.'

'Darling, you have suffered enough for this ... this cause, and your mother and I cannot stand it a moment longer.' Those in the court listened with fascination, no less than did the man who was at last standing so close to the prisoner he had time to notice that her eyes, which yesterday he had decided were blue, were indeed a soft shade of lavender as she looked with love, despair and anger at her father.

'Let me go, Father, please, you have done enough ...'


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'I cannot, Alex. You are ruining your health and if I go home without you your mother will never forgive me as I will never forgive myself. You are not strong ...'

'Father, I am as strong as I need to be. I shall serve whatever sentence I am given.' She swayed slightly and the two policemen tightened their grip but the matter was settled as far as her father and the judge were concerned when she slid to the floor, disappearing behind the rail of the dock.

The doctor sprang forward and with an athlete's grace vaulted over the rail and knelt beside the fallen woman. Her father, too old to leap as he had done, peered anxiously over the rail, then spoke harshly. 'Take your hands off my daughter, or ...'

'I'm a doctor, sir, and she has merely fainted. Now if you will pay her fine we will get her out of here before she comes to, away from the prying eyes hoping for some sort of show.'

The fine was paid and they had her in a cab, her eyelids beginning to flutter, a sigh emerging from her soft mouth. Her father gave the cab driver an address and both the men watched her anxiously as she began to recover consciousness. She was leaning heavily on the doctor's shoulder but the moment she came to she began her tirade, heaving away from him, glaring at her father.

'You had no right, Father, none at all. How dare you interfere with my life. I am over twenty-one and can do as I please. We must take our tactics to the streets to be noticed and identified ...'

'Alex, you have spent the last two years stone-throwing, breaking windows, setting fire to buildings, even attacking the Prime Minister in his motor car. How many times have you been in prison?'

'That is not important, Father.'

'It is to your mother and me. You are precious to us and we want you to come home for a rest.'

'I advise you to listen to your father, Miss ...' Patrick O'Leary began, but he was no match for Miss Alexandra Goodwin.

'And who the devil are you?' she hissed, snatching her hands away from his as he did his best to take her pulse. 'And who gave you permission to lay your hands on me? Dear God, you're all the same. You always know what's best for the little woman, don't you? And what I'd like to know is how you knew I'd be there, Father? I thought you and Mother would understand, particularly Mother for she has been part of it since she was a child. Yesterday was an important day for us, for me, and well you know it.' She stopped to draw a breath and her father spoke mildly before she could continue.

'I have some little influence, darling, and I was well aware of what was to happen probably before you were. I came up yesterday, for your mother swore she could not


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bear to see you locked up in the Third Division, which you would have been with your record. Three months' hard labour, and dearest, you wouldn't have survived it. How many times are you to suffer it? How many more times is she to ...'

'Father, oh Father, you know I can't stop now.' Her voice was soft, patient, loving and the pair of them seemed to have forgotten him. 'They will none of them pay the fine. Emmeline and Christabel and the rest, and I shall be the only one not to be with them. Ever since 'Black Friday' we have been waiting for the Conciliation Bill but there is still no progress. It was then we began our militancy and I know the public are shocked but we must draw attention—'

'Alex, darling, I know, but will you not just have a rest, come home with me for a week or two. The WSPU can manage without you.'

'We have been beaten up by gangs of men and boys ...'

Her father winced and Alex put out her hand to him. 'Darling Pa, I know how this distresses you but we simply can't let them grind us down. Not now. So won't you take me to Clement's Inn where I can at least help in the office? We are putting together a reply to that fool Sir Albert Wright whose letter was printed in The Times stating that 'the failure to recognise that man is the master, and why he is the master, lies at the root of the suffrage movement'. Did you ever hear of anything—'

'Miss Goodwin, is it? Miss Goodwin, I would strongly advise you to return to your home and go straight to bed. Your father is right. I saw what happened to you, and the others, yesterday and as a doctor I believe you would benefit from a rest. I don't suppose you slept much last night and may I ask what you have eaten? I believe—'

She turned on him in astonishment and the doctor saw her father sigh and shake his head as though in exasperation.

'Dear God, don't tell me we have another one who believes that women are fragile little creatures who need protecting by the superiority of man.'

'Alex, please, Mr O'Leary is only trying to help. As a medical man he knows—'

'He knows nothing, Father. There are thousands upon thousands of men out there who think as he does and anyway, what the devil is he doing with you and me? Are you acquainted with him?'

'Miss Goodwin.' Patrick O'Leary could feel the annoyance run through him, annoyance that would change to real anger if this voluble young woman did not be quiet. 'Perhaps you do not recall – in which case you would definitely be better in bed – but you fainted in the courtroom. As a doctor I advised your father to pay your fine, which was pretty hefty, and bring you home. This he did and we are on our way there now. You will not go to Clement's Inn, which is, I believe, the headquarters of the WSPU, but home with your father where I shall make sure you are put to bed. I shall give him instruction to keep you there for at least a few days where you should be fed a light but nourishing diet.'


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He remembered the feel of her in his arms. The rather voluminous blouse she wore, decorated with rows of ruffles down the front, the puff sleeves, the full gathered skirt, again with ruffles round the hem which reached the top of her black boots, had camouflaged the true fineness of her. She had looked fairly well fed as you would expect a woman of her class to be. Slender with small breasts certainly, but not emaciated. And yet in his arms she had been no more substantial than a sparrow he had once held in his hand as a boy. Stick thin her wrists were and her neck looked barely strong enough to support her head. She had lost all colour when she fainted but now it was back in a hectic flush on her cheekbones and he suspected she was feverish and very angry!

'How dare you dictate to me what I should or shouldn't do. Sweet heaven, isn't this the very thing we are fighting for, the right not only to vote but to control our own lives?'

'Oh, for God's sake, woman, get down off your soapbox. Go where you like, for what is it to me?'

'Exactly!'

'Alex, will you listen to Mr O'Leary? Let's get you home and Nan can put you to bed.'

'Father, I'm not a child.'

'Then stop acting like one, Miss Goodwin. Unless you want to damage your health permanently as many of your ... your comrades are doing, then do as your father asks, even if it is only for a few days. You will be better use to your cause if you are fit and healthy.'

'There, Alex, will you not listen to Mr O'Leary?' her father pleaded.

Alex Goodwin looked properly into the face of the man who was doing his best to hold her hand while he endeavoured to take her pulse with long, strong fingers. It was certainly not a handsome face, neither was it young. There was even a touch of grey above his ears. He had removed his brown bowler hat or she had removed it for him with an unconscious movement of her hand as he placed her in the cab and it lay on the floor at his feet. He wore spectacles. His hair was dark, dark as treacle and was straight and heavy, even now falling over his forehead. But as he had been intrigued with her eyes she found it difficult to look away from his. They were steady, surrounded by a heavy fringe of black lashes which made him look somewhat foreign but it was the colour that claimed her attention. They were a smoky brown with points of gold radiating out from the pupil to the edge of the iris, and wrinkles fanned out from each one. His lips were firm but at each corner they were inclined to curl as though at any moment, given the right circumstances, he might break into a broad smile. A cleft slashed each cheek from nose to mouth and there was another in the centre of his chin.

The cabbie clucked at the horse and they came to a stop.


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'Bedford Square, guv,' he announced, and at the sound of his voice Patrick O'Leary and Alex Goodwin came from the strange reverie that had embraced them for a fraction of a second and looked away from each other, but not before something had been kindled which they both refused to recognise!

'Open the door, Mr Goodwin, and I will bring your daughter.' Without further ado Patrick O'Leary swept Alex Goodwin into his arms and carried her to the front door of the house at the edge of Bedford Square. To his surprise she did not struggle.


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