

***WILLIAM JOHN
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A romantic couple is shown in profile, looking at each other and smiling. The woman on the left has long, wavy red hair and is wearing a dark top. The man on the right has short brown hair and is wearing a brown jacket. They are outdoors, with a blurred background of green foliage and a warm, golden light suggesting sunset or sunrise.

***THE DEMAGOGUE
AND LADY
PHAYRE***

William John Locke

The Demagogue and Lady Phayre

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THE DEMAGOGUE AND LADY PHAYRE.

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THE DEMAGOGUE AND LADY PHAYRE

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CHAPTER I—THE ETERNAL FEMININE

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“ If you are coming my way, Goddard, we may as well walk back together,” said the Member, putting on his fur-lined coat.

Mr. Aloysius Gleam, member for Sunington, was a spare, precisely dressed little man on the hither side of forty. He was somewhat bald, and clean-shaven all to a tightly-screwed fair moustache. A gold-rimmed eye-glass added a quaint air of alertness to a shrewd, sharp-featured face.

Goddard acquiesced readily, although on this particular evening his road lay in a different direction. But democrat though he was, he felt flattered by Mr. Gleam’s friendly proposal. He was young—eight and twenty, a cabinetmaker by trade, self-taught and consequently self-opinionated, yet humble enough before evident superiority of knowledge or experience. Besides, in coming to take the chair at his lecture on The New Trades Unionism, before the Sunington Radical Club, the Member had paid him a decided compliment. A member of Parliament has many pleasanter and more profitable ways of spending a precious spare evening during a busy session.

They formed a singular contrast as they stood side by side in the little knot of committee-men who had remained behind after the audience had left. Goddard was above the middle height, squarely built, deep-chested, large-limbed; his decent workman’s clothes hung loosely upon him. His features were dark and massive, chin and forehead square,

nose somewhat fleshy, mouth shutting stubbornly with folds at the sides; the lip, on which, like the rest of his face, no hair grew, rather long; altogether it was a powerful face, showing a nature capable of strong passions both for good and evil. The accident of straight black hair generally falling across his forehead, and a humorous setting of his eyes, relieved the face of harshness. At the present moment it was alive with the frankness of youth, and flushed with the success that had attended his lecture.

The group walked slowly down the hall through the chairs, and lingered for a moment at the clubhouse door. It was a new quarter of London. Mr. Aloysius Gleam had lived in the neighbourhood most of his life, and had seen it spring up from fields and market-gardens into a bustling town, with arteries fed from the life-stream of Oxford Street and the Strand. Its development had been dear to him. There was strong local feeling, and he was deservedly popular. It was therefore some time before he could break away from his supporters. At last he did so, and started with Goddard at a brisk pace up the High Street.

"I have been wondering," he said, after a short silence, "whether you would care to take to politics seriously."

"I hope you don't think I'm playing at it," replied Goddard.

"Tut! don't be so confoundedly touchy," said Gleam good-humouredly. "By 'seriously' I meant entirely, professionally. Would you like to devote all your time to the work?"

"I should think I would," replied Goddard quickly; "but I can't. I have my bread and butter to earn. I don't quite see

why you ask me.”

“Would you accept a position if your bread and butter were assured to you?”

“As a paid agitator? Oh no, thanks! I couldn’t stand that. Work of that sort must be given, not sold.”

“That’s rubbish,” said the Member lightly. “The labourer is worthy of his hire. The notion is as cranky as Tolstoi’s.”

“It isn’t,” said Goddard. “The paid agitator is a fraud. He pretends to be a working-man and he isn’t. When I address a crowd I can say, ‘I am one of yourselves, the real thing. I belong to the Amalgamated Union of Cabinetmakers, and earn my forty bob a week with the work of my hands.’ Men listen to me, and respect me. What I could not swallow would be for a fellow to get up and tell me, ‘It’s all very well for you to talk; but you’re paid for talking, and make a jolly good thing of it. Instead of helping the working-man, you are simply growing fat on the working-man’s hard-earned money.’ I’ve heard that said to paid agitators myself.”

“Well, who said I wanted you to become a paid agitator?” asked Gleam. “I don’t want you to stand on a barrel and address people as ‘fellow-sufferers.’ You are a cut above that kind of thing. What I wanted to propose to you was work on our new National Progressive League. Of course, scores of men are giving their services; but they are men of a certain amount of leisure. They can afford it. The working-man has no leisure to speak of, and we would give anything for the services of a few well-educated, clearheaded working-men like yourself. We could manage three pounds a week—perhaps more. Well, there’s a chance for you.”

Goddard walked on a few steps in silence. He was young, earnest, a passionate champion of the great questions on the Progressive programme. He felt in himself a power to grip the attention of men. He had dreamed vague dreams of personal ambition. Gleam's offer was a great temptation. But the consciousness that it was a temptation made him adhere all the more obstinately to his principles.

"You are very kind," he said at last, "and I am flattered by your opinion of me. But I shouldn't feel justified in giving up my trade: it wouldn't seem right."

"Well, do as you like, my good fellow," replied the Member cheerily. "But I think you're a bit of an idiot. You'll find a thousand first-rate cabinetmakers for one competent politician. Anyhow, if you change your mind——"

"I don't like changing my mind," returned Goddard, with a laugh, "as if it were a shirt."

"We are none of us infallible, not even the youngest," quoted the Member below his breath.

But, taking a broad view of youth, he forbore to rebuke the young man, and turned the conversation upon certain points in the recently delivered lecture. When he reached his turning he shook hands and disappeared.

Goddard looked at his watch, and gave a little whistle of dismay. An omnibus from the west lumbered up. Goddard climbed on to the roof, and returned down the High Street. At the "Golden Stag," where the 'bus route ended, he descended, and proceeded almost at a run down some side streets and lanes, and eventually knocked at a door in a row of workmen's cottages.

“Well, you *are* late,” said a girl who opened the door to him. “I’ve been waiting with my ‘at on for the last three-quarters of an hour. No; you ain’t going to kiss me. If you’d wanted to do that, you’d have found your way here before.”

“I’ve come as fast as I could, Lizzie,” said the young man, somewhat out of breath. “But I went back part of the way with Mr. Gleam, who wanted to speak to me.”

“That’s all very fine,” said Lizzie. “But I think I count for something.”

She led the way into a little front room, where a couple of girls were busy with dressmaking. One of them was bending over a sewing-machine. Bits of stuff and patterns littered the table. A few spotted fashion-plates adorned the walls. The air was heavy with the smell of new mercery.

“Here’s Dan at last!” said Lizzie. “It’s only a case of how d’ye do and good-bye. These are my two cousins. This one’s Emily, and that’s Sophie. Oh, look at the clock! It *is* a shaime!” Goddard shook hands with the two cousins of his affianced—pale, anemic girls, who giggled a little, while Lizzie saw to the straightness of her hat in the gilt mirror over the mantelpiece. When that was done, she admired herself for a moment. She was pretty—with the devil’s prettiness; fluffy fair hair, a pink complexion and small, watery blue eyes—a poetic but discarded admirer had termed them “liquid azure,” which had pleased her mightily. Her mouth had a ripe way of pouting that took the edge off tart speeches, at any-rate in a lover’s opinion, but otherwise it was loose and devoid of character.

“I can’t let him stop to talk,” she said, turning to her cousins. “Father’ll be in an awful stew. I’ll bring him round

another day.”

“If he’ll come,” said Emily, the elder of the two.

“Oh, of course I will,” said Goddard. “I’m very pleased to make your acquaintance.”

He was feeling, somewhat abashed amid these feminine surroundings, and laughed awkwardly. When the door closed behind Lizzie and himself he was relieved.

“I hope you are not vexed with me, Lizzie,” he said humbly. “I really did not know it was so late.”

“It’s no use talking about it,” said Lizzie in an injured tone. “But just let me keep you waiting, and see how you’d like it.”

However, after a time, Lizzie was mollified, and in token thereof drew Daniel’s arm, correctly loverwise, within her own.

“The lecture was a great success,” he said at length. “Many more people than I had expected. I wish you had been there. Only they don’t admit ladies.”

“What was it about? Politics, wasn’t it?”

“Yes—broadly speaking. Strictly it was on the New Trades Unionism. I traced its development, you know, showing how the spirit has changed. The Old Trades Unions were intensely jealous of State interference, because they looked upon the Government as the natural enemy of labour. But now labour is a powerful element in the State, and means to legislate for itself, and so make State-control the very bulwark of its rights. Of course I went into all kinds of details, but that was the general run of it.”

“It must have been awfully clever,” said Lizzie, without much enthusiasm.

“Oh, I don’t know,” laughed the young man. “I was a little nervous at first. You see I have spoken often enough, both at the club and in the open air, and then the words come naturally. You get warmed up, you know, and you let them have it straight. But this is the first time I’ve given a set lecture in cold blood, where everything has got to be expressed in chosen language—but it went very well. Mr. Gleam told me I was quite academic.”

“He’s a great swell, isn’t he?” asked Lizzie. “Drives his carriage and pair, and lives in the big house with the griffins on the front gates. And you walked back with him?”

“Only to the top of the street,” replied Goddard, still sounding an apologetic note. “He wanted to ask me whether I would throw up the workshop and become a paid agent of the National Progressive League.”

“Oh, how nice!” said Lizzie.

“Yes, it was nice of him,” replied Goddard; “but, of course, I declined.”

“Oh, Daniel! How could you? It would have been so much more genteel.”

The word jarred upon him. It set the matter in a new light, and made it look very ugly. Besides, it afforded him a not very satisfactory peep into Lizzie’s spiritual horizon.

“You don’t mind my being a working-man, do you, Lizzie?” he asked, with some reproach.

“Oh, never mind. What’s the odds? We needn’t trouble about it. If you like to wear a dirty apron and have your ‘ands all covered over with varnish and turpentine, I’m sure I don’t care.”

She tossed her head, and drew a little away from him, so that only his fingers touched her arm.

"I don't think we need discuss that," said Goddard stiffly—"unless you think I am not good enough for you. In that case you might as well tell me at once."

"Now you're unkind," said Lizzie.

They walked a few steps in silence, and then Lizzie pulled out a pocket-handkerchief and dabbed her eyes. The young man's heart softened miraculously. He slid back his arm beneath hers, and drew her a little closer.

"I didn't mean to hurt you, Liz. Indeed, I didn't. What can I do to say I'm sorry?"

"You think I don't care for you," whimpered Lizzie. "Every one knows I gave up Joe Forster just for you; and he's got his own tobacco business and keeps an assistant."

The main part of which statement was not exactly in accordance with facts. But Goddard was not in the current of local gossip, and did not suspect his sweetheart's veracity.

"Then you'll forgive me, and we'll make it up?"

"You don't want to break it off?"

"I? Good gracious, no. Why, Liz!"

There was another pause. They were in the middle of the High Street. Knots of loafers hung around the blazing entrances of the public-houses, but otherwise the pavement was more or less deserted.

"Why don't you put your arm round my waist, then?" said Lizzie softly.

Goddard did as he was bidden. She laughed out loud at his shy awkwardness, and pulled his fingers tighter round her figure.

"One'd say I was the only girl you'd ever walked out with."

"Well, you are," replied Goddard simply. "I never bothered much with girls till I knew you."

"I believe that's a cracker," said Lizzie, who was beginning to enjoy the walk.

"It isn't, indeed. I swear it's true."

"Oh! How can you? Well, if it's true it oughtn't to have been. You ought to have had some one to practise on, and then you would have learned to do things nicely. Practice makes perfect, you know."

A light argument followed, which ended in Goddard's discomfiture, and left him with a vague feeling that he had missed one of the duties of man in letting his talent for lovemaking lie dormant, and also an uneasy wonder at the extent of Lizzie's familiarity with the subject. But Lizzie was quite happy.

"You wouldn't like any other girl, would you?"

She rested her head slightly against him. The glare of an electric-lighted shop-front fell on her pretty, upturned face, and the young man forgot everything, save that she had soft puckered lips and young, even teeth.

They were reconciled as far as harmony was ever possible between their natures. The rest of the walk home was undisturbed, and when they arrived at Lizzie's door they were well pleased with each other. She opened the door with her latch-key and, holding it ajar, received his kiss prettily, and then with a desire to complete the reconciliation in all ways, said—