

# The Illustrious Prince

By

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## 1. Mr. Hamilton Fynes, Urgent

There was a little murmur of regret amongst the five hundred and eighty-seven saloon passengers on board the steamship Lusitania, mingled, perhaps, with a few expressions of a more violent character. After several hours of doubt, the final verdict had at last been pronounced. They had missed the tide, and no attempt was to be made to land passengers that night. Already the engines had ceased to throb, the period of unnatural quietness had commenced. Slowly, and without noticeable motion, the great liner swung round a little in the river.

A small tug, which had been hovering about for some time, came screaming alongside. There was a hiss from its wave-splashed deck, and a rocket with a blue light flashed up into the sky. A man who had formed one of the long line of passengers, leaning over the rail, watching the tug since it had come into sight, now turned away and walked briskly to the steps leading to the bridge. As it happened, the captain himself was in the act of descending. The passenger accosted him, and held out what seemed to be a letter.

"Captain Goodfellow," he said, "I should be glad if you would glance at the contents of that note."

The captain, who had just finished a long discussion with the pilot and was not in the best of humor, looked a little surprised.

"What, now?" he asked.

"If you please," was the quiet answer. "The matter is urgent."

"Who are you?" the captain asked.

"My name is Hamilton Fynes," the other answered. "I am a saloon passenger on board your ship, although my name does not appear in the list. That note has been in my pocket since we left New York, to deliver to you in the event of a certain contingency happening."

"The contingency being?" the captain asked, tearing open the envelope and moving a little nearer the electric light which shone out from the smoking room.

"That the Lusitania did not land her passengers this evening."

The captain read the note, examined the signature carefully, and whistled softly to himself.

"You know what is inside this?" he asked, looking into his companion's face with some curiosity.

"Certainly," was the brief reply.

"Your name is Mr. Hamilton Fynes, the Mr. Hamilton Fynes mentioned in this letter?"

"That is so," the passenger admitted.

The captain nodded.

"Well," he said, "you had better get down on the lower deck, port side. By the bye, have you any friends with you?"

"I am quite alone," he answered.

"So much the better," the captain declared. "Don't tell any one that you are going ashore if you can help it."

"I certainly will not, sir," the other answered. "Thank you very much."

"Of course, you know that you can't take your luggage with you?" the captain remarked.

"That is of no consequence at all, sir," Mr. Hamilton Fynes answered. "I will leave instructions for my trunk to be sent on after me. I have all that I require, for the moment, in this suitcase."

The captain blew his whistle. Mr. Hamilton Fynes made his way quietly to the lower deck, which was almost deserted. In a very few minutes he was joined by half a dozen sailors, dragging a rope ladder. The little tug came screaming around, and before any of the passengers on the deck above had any idea of what was happening, Mr. Hamilton Fynes was on board the Anna Maria, and on his way down the river, seated in a small, uncomfortable cabin, lit by a single oil lamp.

No one spoke more than a casual word to him from the moment he stepped to the deck until the short journey was at an end. He was shown at once into the cabin, the door of which he closed without a moment's delay. A very brief examination of the interior convinced him that he was indeed alone. Thereupon he seated himself with his back to the wall and his face to the door, and finding an English newspaper on the table, read it until they reached the docks. Arrived there, he exchanged a civil good-night with the captain, and handed a sovereign to the seaman who held his bag while he disembarked.

For several minutes after he had stepped on to the wooden platform, Mr. Hamilton Fynes showed no particular impatience to continue his journey. He stood in the shadow of one of the sheds, looking about him with quick furtive glances, as though anxious to assure himself that there was no one around who was taking a noticeable interest in his

movements. Having satisfied himself at length upon this point, he made his way to the London and North Western Railway Station, and knocked at the door of the station-master's office. The station-master was busy, and although Mr. Hamilton Fynes had the appearance of a perfectly respectable transatlantic man of business, there was nothing about his personality remarkably striking,--nothing, at any rate, to inspire an unusual amount of respect.

"You wished to see me, sir?" the official asked, merely glancing up from the desk at which he was sitting with a pile of papers before him.

Mr. Hamilton Fynes leaned over the wooden counter which separated him from the interior of the office. Before he spoke, he glanced around as though to make sure that he had not forgotten to close the door.

"I require a special train to London as quickly as possible," he announced. "I should be glad if you could let me have one within half an hour, at any rate.

The station-master rose to his feet.

"Quite impossible, sir," he declared a little brusquely. "Absolutely out of the question!"

"May I ask why it is out of the question?" Mr. Hamilton Fynes inquired.

"In the first place," the station-master answered, "a special train to London would cost you a hundred and eighty pounds, and in the second place, even if you were willing to pay that sum, it would be at least two hours before I could start you off. We could not possibly disorganize the whole of our fast traffic. The ordinary mail train leaves here at midnight with sleeping-cars."

Mr. Hamilton Fynes held out a letter which he had produced from his breast pocket, and which was, in appearance, very similar to the one which he had presented, a short time ago, to the captain of the Lusitania.

"Perhaps you will kindly read this," he said. "I am perfectly willing to pay the hundred and eighty pounds."

The station-master tore open the envelope and read the few lines contained therein. His manner underwent at once a complete change, very much as the manner of the captain of the Lusitania had done. He took the letter over to his green-shaded writing lamp, and examined the signature carefully. When he returned, he looked at Mr. Hamilton Fynes curiously. There was, however, something more than curiosity in his glance. There was also respect.

"I will give this matter my personal attention at once, Mr. Fynes," he said, lifting the flap of the counter and coming out. "Do you care to come inside and wait in my private office?"

"Thank you," Mr. Hamilton Fynes answered; "I will walk up and down the platform."

"There is a refreshment room just on the left," the station-master remarked, ringing violently at a telephone. "I dare say we shall get you off in less than half an hour. We will do our best, at any rate. It's an awkward time just now to command an absolutely clear line, but if we can once get you past Crewe you'll be all right. Shall we fetch you from the refreshment room when we are ready?"

"If you please," the intending passenger answered.

Mr. Hamilton Fynes discovered that place of entertainment without difficulty, ordered for himself a cup of coffee and a sandwich, and drew a chair close up to the small open fire, taking care, however, to sit almost facing the only entrance to the room. He laid his hat upon the counter, close to which he had taken up his position, and smoothed back with his left hand his somewhat thick black hair. He was a man, apparently of middle age, of middle height, clean-shaven, with good but undistinguished features, dark eyes, very clear and very bright, which showed, indeed, but little need of the pince-nez which hung by a thin black cord from his neck. His hat, low in the crown and of soft gray felt, would alone have betrayed his nationality. His clothes, however, were also American in cut. His boots were narrow and of unmistakable shape. He ate his sandwich with suspicion, and after his first sip of coffee ordered a whiskey and soda. Afterwards he sat leaning back in his chair, glancing every now and then at the clock, but otherwise manifesting no signs of impatience. In less than half an hour an inspector, cap in hand, entered the room and announced that everything was ready. Mr. Hamilton Fynes put on his hat, picked up his suitcase, and followed him on to the platform. A long saloon carriage, with a guard's brake behind and an engine in front, was waiting there.

"We've done our best, sir," the station-master remarked with a note of self-congratulation in his tone. "It's exactly twenty-two minutes since you came into the office, and there she is. Finest engine we've got on the line, and the best driver. You've a clear road ahead too. Wish you a pleasant journey, sir."

"You are very good, sir," Mr. Hamilton Fynes declared. "I am sure that my friends on the other side will appreciate your attention. By what time do you suppose that we shall reach London?"

The station-master glanced at the clock.

"It is now eight o'clock, sir," he announced. "If my orders down the line are properly attended to, you should be there by twenty minutes to twelve."

Mr. Hamilton Fynes nodded gravely and took his seat in the car. He had previously walked its entire length and back again.

"The train consists only of this carriage?" he asked. "There is no other passenger, for instance, travelling in the guard's brake?"

"Certainly not, sir," the station-master declared. "Such a thing would be entirely against the regulations. There are five of you, all told, on board,--driver, stoker, guard, saloon attendant, and yourself."

Mr. Hamilton Fynes nodded, and appeared satisfied.

"No more luggage, sir?" the guard asked.

"I was obliged to leave what I had, excepting this suitcase, upon the steamer," Mr. Hamilton Fynes explained. "I could not very well expect them to get my trunk up from the hold. It will follow me to the hotel tomorrow."

"You will find that the attendant has light refreshments on board, sir, if you should be wanting anything," the station-master announced. "We'll start you off now, then. Good-night, sir!"

Mr. Fynes nodded genially.

"Good-night, Station-master!" he said. "Many thanks to you."

## 2. The End Of The Journey

Southward, with low funnel belching forth fire and smoke into the blackness of the night, the huge engine, with its solitary saloon carriage and guard's brake, thundered its way through the night towards the great metropolis. Across the desolate plain, stripped bare of all vegetation, and made hideous forever by the growth of a mighty industry, where the furnace fires reddened the sky, and only the unbroken line of ceaseless lights showed where town dwindled into village and suburbs led back again into town. An ugly, thickly populated neighborhood, whose area of twinkling lights seemed to reach almost to the murky skies; hideous, indeed by day, not altogether devoid now of a certain weird attractiveness by reason of low-hung stars. On, through many tunnels into the black country itself, where the furnace fires burned oftener, but the signs of habitation were fewer. Down the great iron way the huge locomotive rushed onward, leaping and bounding across the maze of metals, tearing past the dazzling signal lights, through crowded stations where its passing was like the roar of some earth-shaking monster. The station-master at Crewe unhooked his telephone receiver and rang up Liverpool.

"What about this special?" he demanded.

"Passenger brought off from the Lusitania in a private tug. Orders are to let her through all the way to London."

"I know all about that," the station-master grumbled. "I have three locals on my hands already,--been held up for half an hour. Old Glynn, the director's, in one of them too. Might be General Manager to hear him swear."

"Is she signalled yet?" Liverpool asked.

"Just gone through at sixty miles an hour," was the reply. "She made our old wooden sheds shake, I can tell you. Who's driving her?"

"Jim Poynton," Liverpool answered. "The guvnor took him off the mail specially."

"What's the fellow's name on board, anyhow?" Crewe asked. "Is it a millionaire from the other side, trying to make records, or a member of our bloated aristocracy?"

"The name's Fynes, or something like it," was the reply. "He didn't look much like a millionaire. Came into the office carrying a small handbag and asked for a special to London. Guvnor told him it would take two hours and cost a hundred and eighty pounds. Told him he'd better wait for the mail. He produced a note from some one or other, and you should have seen the old man bustle round. We started him off in twenty minutes."

The station-master at Crewe was interested. He knew very well that it is not the easiest thing in the world to bring influence to bear upon a great railway company.



"Seems as though he was some one out of the common, anyway," he remarked. "The guvnor didn't let on who the note was from, I suppose?"

"Not he," Liverpool answered. "The first thing he did when he came back into the office was to tear it into small pieces and throw them on the fire. Young Jenkins did ask him a question, and he shut him up pretty quick."

"Well, I suppose we shall read all about it in the papers tomorrow," Crewe remarked. "There isn't much that these reporters don't get hold of. He must be some one out of the common--some one with a pull, I mean,--or the captain of the Lusitania would never have let him off before the other passengers. When are the rest of them coming through?"

"Three specials leave here at nine o'clock tomorrow morning," was the reply. "Good night."

The station-master at Crewe hung up his receiver and went about his duties. Twenty miles southward by now, the special was still tearing its way into the darkness. Its solitary passenger had suddenly developed a fit of restlessness. He left his seat and walked once or twice up and down the saloon. Then he opened the rear door, crossed the little open space between, and looked into the guard's brake. The guard was sitting upon a stool, reading a newspaper. He was quite alone, and so absorbed that he did not notice the intruder. Mr. Hamilton Fynes quietly retreated, closing the door behind him. He made his way once more through the saloon, passed the attendant, who was fast asleep in his pantry, and was met by a locked door. He let down the window and looked out. He was within a few feet of the engine, which was obviously attached direct to the saloon. Mr. Hamilton Fynes resumed his seat, having disturbed nobody. He produced some papers from his breast pocket, and spread them out on the table before him. One, a sealed envelope, he immediately returned, slipping it down into a carefully prepared place between the lining and the material of his coat. Of the others he commenced to make a close and minute investigation. It was a curious fact, however, that notwithstanding his recent searching examination, he looked once more nervously around the saloon before he settled down to his task. For some reason or other, there was not the slightest doubt that for the present, at any rate, Mr. Hamilton Fynes was exceedingly anxious to keep his own company. As he drew nearer to his journey's end, indeed, his manner seemed to lose something of that composure of which, during the earlier part of the evening, he had certainly been possessed. Scarcely a minute passed that he did not lean sideways from his seat and look up and down the saloon. He sat like a man who is perpetually on the qui vive. A furtive light shone in his eyes, he was manifestly uncomfortable. Yet how could a man be safer from espionage than he!

Rugby telephoned to Liverpool, and received very much the same answer as Crewe. Euston followed suit.

"Who's this you're sending up tonight?" the station-master asked. "Special's at Willington now, come through without a stop. Is some one trying to make a record round the world?"

Liverpool was a little tired of answering questions, and more than a little tired of this mysterious client. The station-master at Euston, however, was a person to be treated with respect.

"His name is Mr. Hamilton Fynes, sir," was the reply. "That is all we know about him. They have been ringing us up all down the line, ever since the special left."

"Hamilton Fynes," Euston repeated. "Don't know the name. Where did he come from?"

"Off the Lusitania, sir."

"But we had a message three hours ago that the Lusitania was not landing her passengers until tomorrow morning," Euston protested.

"They let our man off in a tug, sir," was the reply.

"It went down the river to fetch him. The guvnor didn't want to give him a special at this time of night, but he just handed him a note, and we made things hum up here. He was on his way in half an hour. We have had to upset the whole of the night traffic to let him through without a stop."

Such a client was, at any rate, worth meeting. The station-master brushed his coat, put on his silk hat, and stepped out on to the platform.

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