

[The Yellow Crayon](#)

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Chapter 14

Duson entered the sitting-room, noiseless as ever, with pale, passionless face, the absolute prototype of the perfect French servant, to whom any expression of vigorous life seems to savour of presumption. He carried a small silver salver, on which reposed a card.

"The gentleman is in the ante-room, sir," he announced.

Mr. Sabin took up the card and studied it.

"Lord Robert Foulkes."

"Do I know this gentleman, Duson?" Mr. Sabin asked.

"Not to my knowledge, sir," the man answered.

"You must show him in," Mr. Sabin said, with a sigh. "In this country one must never be rude to a lord."

Duson obeyed. Lord Robert Foulkes was a small young man, very carefully groomed, nondescript in appearance. He smiled pleasantly at Mr. Sabin and drew off his gloves.

"How do you do, Mr. Sabin?" he said. "Don't remember me, I daresay. Met you once or twice last time you were in London. I wish I could say that I was glad to see you here again."

Mr. Sabin's forehead lost its wrinkle. He knew where he was now.

"Sit down, Lord Robert," he begged. "I do not remember you, it is true, but I am getting an old man. My memory sometimes plays me strange tricks."

The young man looked at Mr. Sabin and laughed softly. Indeed, Mr. Sabin had very little the appearance of an old man. He was leaning with both hands clasped upon his stick, his face alert, his eyes bright and searching.

"You carry your years well, Mr. Sabin. Yet while we are on the subject, do you know that London is the unhealthiest city in the world?"

"I am always remarkably well here," Mr. Sabin said drily.

"London has changed since your last visit," Lord Robert said, with a gentle smile. "Believe me if I say - as your sincere well-wisher - that there is something in the air at present positively unwholesome to you. I am not sure that unwholesome is not too weak a word."

"Is this official?" Mr. Sabin asked quietly.

The young man fingered the gold chain which disappeared in his trousers pocket.

"Need I introduce myself?" he asked.

"Quite unnecessary," Mr. Sabin assured him. "Permit me to reflect for a few minutes. Your visit comes upon me as a surprise. Will you smoke? There are cigarettes at your elbow."

"I am entirely at your service," Lord Robert answered. "Thanks, I will try one of your cigarettes. You were always famous for your tobacco."

There was a short silence. Mr. Sabin had seldom found it more difficult to see the way before him.

"I imagined," he said at last, "from several little incidents which occurred previous to my leaving New York that my presence here was regarded as superfluous. Do you know, I believe that I could convince you to the contrary."

Lord Robert raised his eyebrows.

"Mr. dear Mr. Sabin," he said, "pray reflect. I am a messenger. No more! A hired commissioner!"

Mr. Sabin bowed.

"You are an ambassador!" he said.

The young man shook his head.

"You magnify my position," he declared. "My errand is done when I remind you that it is many years since you visited Paris, that Vienna is as fascinating a city as ever, and Pesth a few hours journey beyond. But London - no, London is not possible for you. After the seventh day from this London would be worse than impossible."

Mr. Sabin smoked thoughtfully for a few moments.

"Lord Robert," he said, "I have, I believe, the right of a personal appeal. I desire to make it."

Lord Robert looked positively distressed.

"My dear sir," he said, "the right of appeal, any right of any sort, belongs only to those within the circle."

"Exactly," Mr. Sabin agreed. "I claim to belong there."

Lord Roberts shrugged his shoulders.

"You force me to remind you," he said, "of a certain decree - a decree of expulsion passed five years ago, and of which I presume due notification was given to you."

Mr. Sabin shook his head very slowly.

"I deny the legality of that decree," he said. "There can be no such thing as expulsion."

"There was Lefanu," Lord Robert murmured.

"He died," Mr. Sabin answered. "That was reasonable enough."

"Your services had been great," Lord Robert said, "and your fault was but venial."

"Nevertheless," Mr. Sabin said, "the one was logical, the other is not."

"You claim, then," the young man said, "to be still within the circle?"

"Certainly!"

"You are aware that this is a very dangerous claim?"

Mr. Sabin smiled, but he said nothing. Lord Robert hastened to excuse himself.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I should have known better than to have used such a word to you. Permit me to take my leave."

Mr. Sabin rose.

"I thank you, sir," he said, "for the courteous manner in which you have discharged your mission."

Lord Robert bowed.

"My good wishes," he said, "are yours."

Mr. Sabin when alone called Duson to him.

"Have you any report to make, Duson?" he asked.

"None, sir!"

Mr. Sabin dismissed him impatiently.

"After all, I am getting old. He is young and he is strong - a worthy antagonist. Come, let us see what this little volume has to say about him."

He turned over the pages rapidly and read aloud.

"Reginald Cyril Brott, born 18 - , son of John Reginald Brott, Esq., of Manchester. Educated at Harrow and Merton College, Cambridge, M.A., LL.D., and winner of the Rudlock History Prize. Also tenth wrangler. Entered the diplomatic service on leaving college, and served as junior attache at Vienna."

Mr. Sabin laid down the volume, and made a little calculation. At the end of it he had made a discovery. His face was very white and set.

"I was at Petersburg," he muttered. "Now I think of it, I heard something of a young English attache. But - "

He touched the bell.

"Duson, a carriage!"

At Camperdown House he learned that Helene was out - shopping, the hall porter believed. Mr. Sabin drove slowly down Bond Street, and was rewarded by seeing her brougham outside a famous milliner's. He waited for her upon the pavement. Presently she came out and smiled her greetings upon him.

"You were waiting for me?" she asked.

"I saw your carriage."

"How delightful of you. Let me take you back to luncheon."

He shook his head.

"I am afraid," he said, "that I should be poor company. May I drive home with you, at any rate, when you have finished?"

"Of course you may, and for luncheon we shall be quite alone, unless somebody drops in."

He took his seat beside her in the carriage. "Helene," he said, "I am interested in Mr. Brott. No, don't look at me like that. You need have no fear. My interest is in him as a man, and not as a politician. The other days are over and done with now. I am on the defensive and hard pressed."

Her face was bright with sympathy. She forgot everything except her old admiration for him. In the clashing of their wills the victory had remained with her. And as for those things which he had done, the cause at least had been a great one. Her happiness had come to her through him. She bore him no grudge for that fierce opposition which, after all, had been fruitless.

"I believe you, UNCLE," she said affectionately. "If I can help you in any way I will."

"This Mr. Brott! He goes very little into society, I believe."

"Scarcely ever," she answered. "He came to us because my husband is one of the few Radical peers."

"You have not heard of any recent change in him - in this respect?"

"Well, I did hear Wolfendon chaffing him the other day about somebody," she said. "Oh, I know. He has been going often to the Duchess of Dorset's. He is such an ultra Radical, you know, and the Dorsets are fierce Tories. Wolfendon says it is a most unwise thing for a good Radical who wants to retain the confidence of the people to be seen about with a Duchess."

"The Duchess of Dorset," Mr. Sabin remarked, "must be, well - a middle-aged woman."

Helene laughed.

"She is sixty if she is a day. But I daresay she herself is not the attraction. There is a very beautiful woman staying with her - the Countess Radantz. A Hungarian, I believe."

Mr. Sabin sat quite still. His face was turned away from Helene. She herself was smiling out of the window at some acquaintances.

"I wonder if there is anything more that I can tell you?" she asked presently.

He turned towards her with a faint smile.

"You have told me," he said, "all that I want to know."

She was struck by the change in his face, the quietness of his tone was ominous.

"Am I meant to understand?" she said dubiously "because I don't in the least. It seems to me that have told you nothing. I cannot imagine what Mr. Brott and you have in common."

"If your invitation to lunch still holds good," he said, "may I accept it? Afterwards, if you can spare me a few minutes I will make things quite clear to you."

She laughed.

"You will find," she declared, "that I shall leave you little peace for luncheon. I am consumed with curiosity."