

# Lord Gordon

## A Pug with a Royal Mission

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### Prologue

Big Ben, the venerable clock tower on the Thames, let the world know that the new day was half an hour old with deep gongs. All the proper and honorable citizens of London had already gone to bed long ago, had turned off their nightlights and slept. A few of them were probably gently turning over or snuggling further into their blankets, as it was a very cold October night. Not one of these sleepers was aware that at that very moment, a small pug was fighting for his life in the slums.

As fast as his little legs would carry him, Lord Gordon raced through the alleys. He hadn't been able to shake off his pursuers yet. There were at least six dogs. Their greedy panting stung his ears. Again and again his paws slipped on the damp cobblestones and he lost precious seconds — seconds his dog instincts told him could mean the difference between life and death. The yellowish fog that drifted up from the Thames and through the alleyways ached in his lungs. Lord Gordon retched and coughed. He ran and ran. He jumped over the legs of a drunkard who slept leaning against a wine barrel in the street. He darted in zigzags around men, women and raggedy children. He raced past dilapidated houses and through stinking puddles. And still the insatiable panting of his pursuers came ever closer.

Lord Gordon threw a glance over his shoulder. But like a cruel ally, the fog covered the street dogs in an impenetrable veil. There — an inconspicuous side alley. He had almost missed it. Maybe this way would lead to freedom. Or Lord Gordon would find a crack, a box, a wicker basket. Something he could hide in. His breath heaved.

In the sparse light of a gas lamp, Lord Gordon's hopes shattered into a thousand pieces. Nothing. Only insurmountable walls. Next to him, in front of him. He was trapped.

But what was this?

An unnerving silence.

Lord Gordon perked up his ears and listened intently. No panting? No paws trampling the ground? No growled commands? Had he somehow managed to... he almost didn't dare think that thought to the end... was it possible that he'd managed to shake off his pursuers? Slowly, he turned around toward the entrance of the alleyway, and froze.

There they stood.

There were nine of them.

And the sight of them was blood curdling. Bloodlust glimmered in their eyes. Growling and baring their teeth they crept toward him with lowered heads and raised hackles.

"Why ya running away, Fatso?" grumbled their leader, a mutt with matted fur that must have been home to an entire civilization of fleas. Where his left eye should have been, a deep scar cut across across his face. "We ain't doin' nuthin to youse. Just wanna play wit ya a little!"

"That is a delightful and friendly offer," Lord Gordon replied. Hopefully none of them noticed how much his voice was shaking. "I appreciate it most sincerely. And I cannot express to you gentlemen how very disappointed I am to have to decline. Because I am expected at home."

As he had spoken, the dogs had moved ever closer to him. Despairing, Lord Gordon backed up further and further, until a damp wall at his back blocked his retreat.

"Whadya want at home? They already know youse there!" The leader sounded a throaty laugh, which the others echoed hoarsely.

"You! They already know *you* there." Lord Gordon could have bitten off his own tongue. The sentence had slipped out before he could stop himself. "Ouch!"

At a signal from the leader, a mean, muscular little dog had shot forward lightning fast and bitten his leg. Which the others seemed to find hilarious.

"Yer in a real fine pickle, fattykins," snickered the leader. "Think me grammar needs bein' corrected?"

“A dreadful habit,” said Lord Gordon quickly. “I beg your forgiveness.”

“Fuhgivniss, fuhgivniss,” the leader mocked after him.

Lord Gordon’s knees were growing weak and he noticed himself feeling dizzy. He was scared, so incredibly scared. In the meantime the street curs had surrounded him. Like a ball, they pushed him around between themselves. First lightly, then with more and more force. The gas lantern flickered one last time and went out, as if it did not want to be a witness to what was going to happen next.

“Sad fer youse, our games don’t got nothin’ to do wit grammar,” the leader continued with mock concern. “Nah. Us here is great fans of nice liddle doggie fights.”

“Dog fights?” Lord Gordon’s voice had lost all strength.

“Ezzactly!” the leader panted as slobber ran out of his mouth. “Youse can even pick out who ya wanna fight. Whoe’er’s alive at the end, he wonned. Them’s the rules, nice ‘n’ easy. Not so complicated like with yer stupid grammar.”

Lord Gordon’s glance darted from one street mutt to the next. A pug was a lapdog. More brains than muscles. He simply was not built for fighting.

“Listen,” he said, trying to find a diplomatic resolution to the situation. “How about we come to a compromise? If you gentlemen let me go, then you shall receive your hearts’ desires. I mean it! No matter what it is. I have very influential friends.”

“Shuddup!” shouted the leader. “We has what we wanted arready — youse!”

A dangerous growling made Lord Gordon’s blood freeze in his veins. He looked up, aghast. Another pack of the most depraved looking hounds had assembled on top of the walls surrounding him.

With baited breath, Lord Gordon observed as the dogs along the wall formed an opening to let someone pass through.

A large black shadow cut across the fog-shrouded moon. It was — Lord Gordon began to tremble — the shadow of a wolf! As it drew back its lips, powerful fangs came into view. Its threatening growling echoed from the walls.

Lord Gordon’s tormentors involuntarily backed away from him a few steps.

“Git ready boys,” Scarface called to his pack.

Everything started to spin in Lord Gordon’s head. The dogs’ battle howling was the last thing he heard. Then he lost consciousness and sank into the dirt.

Like lightning bugs in a balmy summer night, bright lights flickered in front of Lord Gordon's closed eyelids.

"A dream!" was the first thought that came to his mind, with relief. He stretched out all four legs. An unexplained pain shot through his muscles. But Lord Gordon was far too happy to be waking from that hell to pay any mind to the ache.

It was all just a terrible, terrible dream! Being chased, the mangy street hounds, it was nothing more than a bad dream. Lord Gordon sighed. He was at home, at home in Buckingham Palace. Everything was fine.

Languorously he stretched out on his warm, soft, rose petal scented satin pillow and breathed in deeply.

"Great Dog in heaven!" Disgusted, he contorted his face. Whatever he was lying on was anything but fragrant. It smelled musty, to put it in friendly terms. No, he couldn't express it in any other way, despite his good upbringing: it stank horribly. A mixture of mildew, trash, and rot. This did not smell at all like the palace.

And there shouldn't be common straw sticking out of his satin pillow poking his cheeks. He opened his eyes.

This... this was not his chamber!

A strip of pale moonlight shone through a hole in the ceiling, and Lord Gordon recognized that he found himself in a windowless shed. Eerie shadows gathered in a corner and whispered with each other.

Lord Gordon's little heart plummeted into the depths. He felt hot and cold.

It had not been a dream after all.

It had all really happened. The chase... The terrible dogs...

And now they had even kidnapped him! Where had they taken him? And what were they planning to do with him?

Lord Gordon swallowed hard. Tears rolled across his face as he traveled in his mind. Back to the day when the adventure had begun...

## **Buckingham Palace**

### **London SW1A 1AA**

### **United Kingdom**

Lord Gordon. Royal pug. Companion and lapdog of Her Majesty Victoria, Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Empress of India. And of course, he was her absolute favorite dog. And as such, he wanted for nothing.

Lord Gordon had his own butler at his command, Mr. Ambrosius Huxton. Lord Gordon inhabited the magnificent chamber directly next to the queen and his bed was no dog's basket, but a proper, warm, soft, snuggly little bed, on whose velvet and silk pillows he lounged comfortably.

If he had had his way, he could have spent the entire day sleeping, dozing and contemplating his own importance. But sadly, that was not going to happen. The hurried footsteps of Mr. Huxton were already approaching. There was a knock at the door.

“Good morning, Lord Gordon! I hope you rested well,” the butler said in a nasal tone and stepped in.

With half-open eyes Lord Gordon watched as his butler set a steaming kettle on the washstand, pushed aside the drapes, and lit the gas lamps.

Lord Gordon sniffed. He lifted his head and sniffed again. Hmmm... What delicious aromas were rising to his nose! His breakfast was being prepared.

With a contented sigh, Lord Gordon stretched all four legs. Wasn't life just splendid?

In the next moment he basked in fragrant, warm bath water. Yes. Life was good! After Mr. Huxton had washed, dried, massaged and groomed him with a hundred brush strokes, then sprayed him with rose perfume, only one thing was missing: the diamond collar the queen had given him for his second birthday. Huxton draped it around his neck with aplomb and then held the large mirror in front of his nose. Critically, Lord Gordon turned his head to the left and to the right. He lifted his chin and he lowered it.

He was so handsome, so incredibly handsome. So well groomed. So elegant. Ah, from the tips of his ears to his tail, he was the perfect pug! And his stomach was growling.