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The Perfect Rebel:
The Life and Death of Emily Davison

written by

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The Perfect Rebel:

The Life and Death of Emily Davison

By
Deborah Chancellor

Chapter One

Death At The Races

June 4th 1913

“Place your bets please, gentlemen!” cried Tom.

Tom’s father was a bookie, and it was Derby Day at the Epsom Race Course.

“Have a flutter on the King’s horse!” Tom called out to the passers-by.

As the crowds surged past, a tall, slim woman bumped into the fifteen-year old boy. She was wearing a long, thick coat, and looked hot and uncomfortable.

“Are you alright, Miss?” asked Tom.

The woman looked at him and a sad smile flicked across her face.

“Yes, thank you,” she replied. “But I’ll be even better soon.”

Tom watched as she disappeared into the crowd. She seemed different from the many people, rich and poor, who had come to enjoy the Epsom Derby that sunny afternoon. Tom frowned, and turned back to face the punters.

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The Epsom Derby was the social event of the year. It was Wednesday June 4th, 1913, a date marked on everyone's calendar. The highlight was the Royal Race at 3 o'clock. Excited crowds lined the course, waiting for the race to begin. Children waved flags and adults checked their race cards.

"They're off!" a voice cried, to the sound of pounding hooves. The tension mounted. Crowds pushed forward at the corner by the home straight, straining to see the horses as they thundered past.

Tom watched from his father's betting kiosk. Anmer, the royal horse, was having a bad race,

and was far back in the field. Suddenly, someone ducked under the barrier, and walked across the course ...straight into Anmer’s path. Tom gasped. It was that woman ... She was waving something in her hand.

What came next seemed to happen in slow motion. Anmer reared up, throwing his jockey to the ground and kicking the woman in the air, like a rag doll. The horse lost his balance and tumbled, and the woman fell to earth with a sickening thud. Anmer struggled up to complete the race.

The crowd watched in horror. A lady standing near Tom nudged her husband.

“It’s one of those suffragettes!” she said. Sure enough, the injured woman was clutching the white, green and purple flag of the ‘Votes for Women’ campaign.

“Those crazy women aren’t fit to vote,” her angry husband replied.

Tom squeezed his way through the crowd to get a better look. Policemen were forming a line to hold the people back. The royal jockey was carried off the course. The suffragette was covered in blood, and lay unconscious on the turf. Men were moving her onto a stretcher.

“I know who she is!” Tom heard a policeman say. “It’s Emily Davison. What a trouble maker! Her prison record’s as long as my arm.”

A doctor checked the woman’s weak pulse.

“I don’t think she’ll bother you again,” he replied. “We’ll take her to hospital, but there’s not much we can do.”

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A few days later, Tom read a report of Emily Davison’s death in his father’s newspaper. He couldn’t get the suffragette’s face out of his mind.

One question really haunted him.

Why had Emily Davison done what she did?