

**GEORGINA TALBOT -
STEAMPUNK PRINCESS**



**THE SECRET LIFE OF AN
EXTRAORDINARY
GENTLEWOMAN**

BY MR GARY MITCHELL

**EPISODE TWO - A GREATER
LOVE HATH NO MAN**

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The Story So Far...

It is 1850 – and in a freak accident Bournemouth gentlewoman Georgina Talbot has inherited the special power of electrical projection, whilst her sister, Marianne, has become bride to vampire Lord Winton. Can the sisters yet continue their philanthropic work..?

I

His name was David Tuck. Tall - handsome many thought – he had acquired throughout the town a reputation for moral decency and respect for all. Combined with a talent for getting things done this had earned him the esteem of his betters and the lower classes alike.

“The Mesdames Talbot will see you now”, Parker the butler showed Tuck into the drawing room at Hinton Wood House.

“Ladies”, he politely removed his hat and deferentially nodded, his thick brown hair ruffled, brown eyes piercing with natural intelligence.

“Mr Tuck, please sit”, though the younger Georgina was the dominant sister, so suggested. “Tea please, Parker”.

“Miss Georgina”, as the aged butler left she felt swell within her bosom the kind of emotion for her artisan guest most *inappropriate* in a maiden gentlewoman of her class. Rightly suppressing the base notion she retrieved the plans for the ‘model village’ she and her sister intended to build, her lifework, her legacy to posterity...

“You have lived in the area long, Mr Tuck?” Marianne engaged the construction expert.

“Indeed Miss Marianne”, he affirmed. “I am most intimately acquainted with the landscape”.

“That is good”, Georgina constantly feared her sister would speak too loud – open her mouth to expose her newly grown fangs to public gaze, thereby to betray her transformation into *vampira*.

But not today. “The architect’s plans”, she unrolled.

“Begging your pardon Miss Georgina”, Tuck’s eyes met hers. “But, perchance, you could first explain your intentions for this village of yours?”

“Of... of course...” his steady masculine gaze flustered.

“A splendid idea Mr Tuck”, Marianne agreed. “We are so familiar with our project we sometimes forget others may not be so, do we not, Sister?”

“Indeed”, Georgina agreed – a pause occurring as Parker arrived with tea. “Thank you, Parker”, she saw her guest smile.

“Something amuses you, Mr Tuck?” Marianne was quickly onto it.

“Not at all, Miss Marianne”, he affirmed. “I note your politeness to your servants, and approve. So many of the higher orders are not. ‘Politeness costs nothing’, do they not say?”

“You are a Radical, Sir?” she pressed.

“I believe, Ladies, in improving the lot of all God creatures. Perhaps you could call me but a... a ‘reformer’ rather than a ‘radical’”.

“Indeed”, Georgina was impressed but his forthright nature and intelligence, could imagine herself enjoying with him extensive discourse upon the subject of social progress...

“Sister?” noting her stare at their guest Marianne interjected. “You wish me relate the rationale behind our village?”

“No, Sister, I shall”, Georgina forced her beating heart collect her thoughts. “It was whilst living in Bournemouth we discovered the many poor suffering in the region”, she waxed lyric of their proposed philanthropy. “We so do not wish them to end up in the local workhouse”.

“A worthy aim”, Tuck agreed.

“Yet if – as they say – ‘the poor are always with us’ – the solution is not simply to give them *money*”.

“That they would but drink it away”, Marianne endorsed.

“Work is the curse of the drinking classes”, their guest agreed.

“I am gratified we are of one mind”, Georgina continued with barely a pause for comment. “The local poor need to improve themselves so as not to become but the next generation of smugglers and poachers. We, the privileged, we must provide them employment, moral guidance and decent housing. For a rental, of course”.

“Such as the celebrated Mr Robert Owen’s New Lanark, in Scotland?”

“You are familiar with his work?” Marianne was most impressed.

“Education is the key to improvement of all classes, is it not Miss Georgina?”

“You are yourself an educated man, Mr Tuck?” she probed.

“Self improved, Miss”, he deprecated.

“Hence our project appeals?” Marianne inquired.

“Most certainly”.

“And you pass these enlightened values onto your family?”

“My son Michael, yes”, Tuck confirmed.

“Then you are married?” Georgina felt waves of both depression and relief engulf.



“Sadly, Ladies, my wife Charlotte was carried off by the cholera two years ago”.

“That we are most sorry to hear”, the psychic vampire within Marianne noted her sister’s spirit lighten with the widower’s declaration of current singularity. “Shall we inspect the plans..?”

Across the county of Dorsetshire Professor Winston Moriarty – less clever brother of the eminent James - entered the hovel that was ‘*The Black Bear*’, a tavern that claimed to be Wool’s premier inn. He had not long been employed at the Royal Military Vehicle Research Establishment (RMVRE) at nearby Bovington Camp. With war with the Russian bear looming it seemed an appropriate place to meet.

Purchasing a pint of frothing ale he took a secluded seat, and waited. Nervous he tried to read his newspaper, but unable to concentrate began to tap his fingers on the table.

“You are nervous, Monsieur?” a young woman of unmistakable Gallic accent and appearance swiftly appeared from nowhere to sit opposite. Next to her a gap-toothed Parisian ruffian of huge size and menacing demeanour likewise materialised.

“I am waiting for someone”, he wondered if this was indeed she.

“*Dacord*. I understand you have debts, *n’est pas?*” she discreetly produced from her bag a purse.

“I do”, at a gesture from the beauty Moriarty inspected the contents – gold sovereigns – as expected.

“Gambling eez a vice we can assist you with”, she determined. “You ‘ave zer plans?”

“Yes”, checking they weren’t overheard or seen Moriarty produced from inside his jacket the copied blueprints.

“Then we exchange, no?” she completed the deal – and with her minion in tow – delicately rose to depart.

“I... I didn’t catch your name?” Moriarty stammered.

“I didn’t give it, Monsieur”, she smiled and left - she being Mademoiselle Marianne Blerot of the Emperor Napoleon III’s security service.



And as she left the inn Moriarty consoled his treachery with the fact that, at the particular moment in history, England and France were allies against the Russian Tsar and his evil machinations...

“It is possible”, Mr Tuck carefully considered the building plans. “But the expense of your designs? Unnecessary in my opinion”.

“It is what I *require*, Mr Tuck”, Georgina affirmed.

“As you wish Miss Talbot”, he freely conceded. “But may I ask why such ornate and individual designs?”

“Of course”, she proceeded to explain. “I was most impressed by Herr Zschokke’s book, *The Gold-Maker’s Village*. The architecture of alpine Germany greatly appeals”.

“My sister is quite determined to be indulged upon the matter of ornamental individuality”, Marianne teased.

“I understand”, Tuck accepted. “Given your extended timescale and sufficient funds all things are possible. Now, the question comes of labour?”

“I intend we employ the poor to clear the land to build cottages. Thrift, sobriety and hard-work will provide the honest working-class with homes for their families. Each cottage will an acre of land, so the families can grow vegetables and have fruit trees to eat, to see them through times of temporary hardship. Animal pens too – for pigs and chickens – oh - and a well”.

“And a flush privy for each”, Marianne was necessarily indelicate.

“We believe a rental of between four and five shillings per week would be equitable?” Georgina’s stare at her sister reached the heights of wuthering.

Yet Mr Tuck seemed not to have noticed. “It is possible”, he again considered the sketches and plans. “And”, he smiled, “who am I to deny two such charming ladies their plans for bettering the socially disadvantaged?”

Deal done, conscience troubled, Professor Moriarty wended his way back across the old stone bridge towards Bovington Camp. At the gate he was met by a red-uniformed guard who – recognising him – saluted.

“Professor!” seemingly from nowhere Captain D’Urberville hastened. “Where have you been?”

“Oh”, Winston almost stammered to deliver his alibi, “to the Post Office, to be sure. A letter to my brother”.

“My orders, Sir, are that you are to be escorted at all time”.

“Orders, Captain?”



General Kipling's military priorities were clear...

“From General Kipling himself, Sir. He is most anxious the calculating-machine driven perambulator be ready for the Prince Consort's Great Exhibition”.

“It will be ready Captain, I assure you”.

“Nevertheless Sir, General Kipling's orders are most precise. Sergeant Troy!”

“Sir!” a tough looking cavalryman appeared from within the guardhouse.

“Attend upon the Professor. Ensure no harm comes to him or his work”.

“I shall lend all assistance”, Troy's wolf-like grin assured.

Were they on to him? Moriarty knew not.

Only that he now had a shadow...

As the strapping Mr Tuck strode off to request cost tenders Georgina felt quite giddy with the prospect of her model village at last reaching fruition.

“Wow!” Marianne suggested. “He is *hot!*”

“Sister!” Georgina admonished. “Since becoming the *bride* of one of Satan's servants you quite forget all propriety”.

“Satan' is but an anagram of 'Santa'”, her sister reminded. “And you forget I am now psychic”.

“Yet you are mistaken, Sister”, Georgina was calmly brusque.

“Am I? Well, we shall see over the months and years Mr Tuck is in our employ. See how his muscles ripple and knot as he labours to construct...”

“That’s enough!” if Georgina quite lost her poise... she realised Marianne had now uncovered her new Achilles heel.

“Enough for *now*”, like a dog with a bone her elder sister now had an angle with which to pry.

And a female dog at that...



II

The secret – Victorium – was now out there. Despite the prevailing view of *laissez-faire*¹ Her Majesty's Government had taken great interest in the work of the Shelleys². Naturally the military were anxious to exploit, to see the potential for a Victorium-powered Babbage-like 'calculating machine' able, by harnessing electricity and the aether, to act as the artificial mind of machines, bent to the purpose of man. Mechanical slaves, if you will. Both the Admiralty and War Office had commenced research – a race with their opposite numbers across the Great Powers of the world.

With the Prince Consort's Great Exhibition looming such novel devices should rightly hold pride of place. Although the Prince had expressly banned weapons from display exceptions were to be made, where warranted. The American Mr Samuel Colt's mass-produced gun of interchangeable parts was one, the RMVRE's obliquely named 'perambulator' was to be another, though its weapons were to be discreetly omitted...

Months passed, and work on Talbot Village continued apace. Volunteers to build and then live in the establishment were not hard to find, and under Mr Tuck's direction the land upon the heath was soon cleared in order construction begin. Despite Marianne's knowing approbation, Georgina found herself frequently making 'inspections'; though in her heart and mind she knew this was as much to enjoy the convivial company of her stoically attractive site manager, as to attend to her philanthropic duty.

This particular day Marianne and her vampire consort, Lord Winton, were absent in London on some *unmentionable* activity involving pentangles, blood sacrifice and shifty white gowns of dubious decency. Tuck was unexpectedly accompanied by his son, Michael.

"Miss Georgina", the lad dutifully bowed upon introduction.

"Michael's school is closed for the day", Tuck senior explained. "Her Majesty's Inspectors are in. It would be unseemly for the students to view their teachers flogged for failing to reach government targets".

"Not to mention undermine discipline", with her charitable interest in education Georgina knew some technicalities of the profession.

"I wish today to assist Father with his work", Michael asserted.

"Industry and thrift and indeed worthy virtues", she agreed, noting the boy the spitting image of his father in all things; that perhaps aspects of

¹ 'As little government interference in the economy as possible' (Ed.)

² See *Episode One* (Ed.)

his deceased mother manifested in other ways? “I am pleased you take such interest in the ethic of work, Master Tuck”.

“Thank you, Ma’am”, the boy was polite - as one always should be to one’s betters.

“Ahem!” Tuck politely interjected.

“Mr Tuck?” Georgina responded with a smile.

“Though contracted to but clear the site and direct the building for you Miss Talbot, I nevertheless consider your project worthy of my personal interest. If, of course, you do not consider such interest impertinent?”

Impertinent? Despite herself Georgina felt her pulse quicken at the prospect. “Not at all Mr Tuck. I, er, I *welcome* your interest. I – we – my sister and I – believe moral wellbeing a matter of public standard and individual choice. A forced code and religion sours a man’s temper, does it not?”

“Indeed Miss Talbot”, he smiled. “To take root men must be guided to religion rather than have it forced upon them”.

“I wish my village open to all those who love God, keep the commandments, and honour the Queen”, Georgina returned his charming smile with pleased decorum. “There are to be no taverns in Talbot Village. Another rule is that there is to be no overcrowding in the houses. Also, the people will not be allowed to run businesses. Self-sufficiency and improvement, yes. Profit, unseemly”.

Tuck nodded thoughtfully. “I find our minds are much in accord, Miss Georgina”.

“From you, Mr Tuck, I take that as a compliment”, she laughed.

“For so it is given”, Tuck paused upon their walk.

“Father!” Michael interrupted. “I do believe that is a Norwegian Blue!” he pointed to a nearby tree. “Might I be permitted closer inspection? It has beautiful plumage - and it is most rare for such parrots to migrate via this kingdom?”

“Please do”.

“Miss Talbot”, the boy politely doffed his cap as he departed upon his ornithological exploration.

Georgina waited until he was out of earshot. “An impressive young man. You have done well”.

“Thank you”, Tuck paused - the summoning his courage - spoke with renewed vigour. “Forgive me asking, Miss Georgina. But how is it a



handsome, articulate, intelligent and philanthropic lady such as yourself has remained unmarried?”

At such a bold question Georgina flustered. “How could I ever be sure it was *I* a suitor desired, not my fortune?”

“I understand”, he nodded agreement. “An act guaranteeing women property rights is sorely needed”.

“Agreed”, she sighed. “Like the great Queen Elizabeth I am married to my vocation”.

“Then that shall be your legacy”, he approved. “And build it here we shall”.

His unequivocal support gave her pause for thought. “Forgive my asking, Mr Tuck, but I feel I am now entitled to return the impertinence. Why have you not remarried? If for no other reason than to provide a mother for your son?”

“A fair question”, he sighed. “My late wife Charlotte and I were much in love – and I could not marry for less. Michael thrives under the care of my sister. Should she wish to marry I would not stand in her way, but at present that is not an issue”.

“Indeed”, observing from a distance the boy spy and document by sketch his avian quarry she strode on - but inadvertently slipped on a rabbit hole.

“Careful Georgina!” before he had time to think of decency David had moved to catch her - to prevent her fall - and a shared moment of *knowledge* passed between them as he held her - for perhaps an instant too long.

“I, I, mean ‘Miss Talbot’. I meant no discourtesy by familiarity, only to...”

“Yes, yes, I understand”, she hastily separated - stood back - just as young Michael fortuitously returned.

“Miss Talbot? Father?”

“Have no fear Michael - the lady is uninjured!”

“The parrot had flown off”.

“Oh, such a pity”, David flushed. “Ho! You Sir!” by way of distraction he hailed one of the poor, labouring to clear heathland scrub. “You’ll do yourself an injury! Let me show you how to properly hold a scythe!”

But if the son remained oblivious... both the father and the lady now recognised that forbidden attraction that refuses to acknowledge the boundaries of station, and of class...

“Damn and blast!” General Kipling slammed his fist upon the table in frustration at the dire intelligence now so damningly confirmed.

“Is ‘*Warrior*’ ready for demonstration at the Great Exhibition?” government minister, Secretary at War, Sidney Herbert, demanded.

“Almost, Minister”, Kipling knew the RMVRE’s ‘landship’ was still working-up. But that wasn’t the problem. The real problem was - as so often in the history of England’s green and pleasant sceptred isle - the French!

Yes - the French! Those snail-eating, wine-swilling, croissant-ingesting trouble-makers trans *La Manche*. Sgt Troy’s suspicions about Professor Moriarty had been passed on to Captain D’Urberville who - assisted by Special Agent Bond of Her Majesty’s Secret Service - had completed a most thorough investigation. Moriarty had, it transpired, been passing military secrets to the *Crapauds* in exchange for money to support his gambling debts - the bounder!



Sidney Herbert - hot date?

And now the Froggies own landship, the ‘*Gloire*’, was about to enter service. Confound it they were nominal allies! Soon the Ruskies, the Prussians, the Austrians, the Yankees... soon all sorts of ‘Johnny Foreigner’ would be in a position to match the technological edge of the British Empire, ‘the workshop of the world’. Britannia may still rule the waves - but the land, it seemed, was yet to be.

“I would still like to see a demonstration, General”, Herbert demanded. “Today”.

“Something will be arranged, Minister”, Kipling assured. “In the meantime, perhaps an aperitif..?”

“A church?” normality restored Tuck duly considered. “A laudable addition, Miss Georgina. But it will be beyond my ability to plan and construct”.

“Yet my sister and I are determined there should be one in the village”.

“You and your sister are motivated by strong moral and religious beliefs, Ma’am”, young Michael affirmed.

“You approve?” she smiled indulgently upon the boy who appeared but a junior version of the father.

“Of course”.

“Then you are your father’s son, Master Tuck”.

“I try, Ma’am”, he replied as David looked on with pride.

Yet Tuck senior was somewhat troubled by the announcement.

“Forgive me, Miss Georgina, but I assume your new church will be of the established faith?”³

“Of course, Mr Tuck”, if she admired his perspicacity, his forthright nature and assertive demeanour were also attractive traits. And after her stumble earlier? Well, time to privately admit that in her most secret dreams he had frequently taken her in his arms and...

“But many of the people here are Dissenters? Methodists, Baptists and such”, Tuck further probed her disposition.

“That is their choice - and they shall not be excluded”, Georgina returned to reality. “My sister and I do not intend religion become a stumbling block” (for with Marianne now secretly one of Satan’s handmaidens that would be hypocrisy indeed).

“A very enlightened attitude, Miss Talbot”, young Michael suggested.

“Why thank you, Master Tuck”. Georgina approved the child’s perceptiveness.

Found herself privately imagining what a singularly ideal step-son he would make...

“Behold Minister!” General Kipling veritably shone with pride.

“*HMLS ‘Warrior’!*”

“Indeed?” Sidney Herbert looked confused. “Apart from the crew lined-up on parade, it seems to me just like an ordinary Victorium-powered railway locomotive?”

“Camouflage, Minister”.

“Camouflage, General?”

“Camouflage”, Kipling prided. “‘*Warrior*’ is part calculating machine - ‘a robot in disguise’”, he nodded at Captain D’Urberville - who gestured at Sgt Troy - who promptly barked an order to cause the ten-man crew to board with practised alacrity. With a whirl of gears and a hissing of steam the ‘locomotive’ rose into the air, shuddered - then with a screech of tearing metal mutated and transmogrified into a *landship* - complete with gun turrets, bridge, wheels, portholes and auxiliary steam engine.

The whole process took less than two minutes.

“Her Majesty’s landship ‘*Warrior*’ ready for inspection, Sah!” Sgt Troy proudly addressed to his superiors.

“And it’s ready for the Prince Consort’s Great Exhibition?” Herbert got to the bottom line.

³ The Church of England (*Ed.*)

“Only a few minor glitches to iron-out”, if Kipling was confident D’Urberville was reluctant to lie to a minister of the Crown...

Pride in his work? The dignity of labour? It was yet another of David Tuck’s qualities Georgina Talbot found most agreeable.

“This village is a project to be proud of, Michael”, he enthused and shared Georgina’s philanthropic vision. “The Mesdames Talbot have determined upon accommodation being reserved for those who wish to help themselves, but are otherwise unable so to do”.

“Posterity deserves to remember you and your gracious sister, Miss Talbot”, the boy agreed.

“Why, thank you Michael”, she indeed experienced - fleetingly - the sin of pride - but trusting to her reward in Heaven suppressed it.

As indeed she must all feeling for her handsome contractor and his demi-orphaned, child prodigy, offspring...

Back at Bovington all was progressing well with the practical demonstration. In the presence of Her Majesty’s Secretary of State at War *HMLS ‘Warrior’* was able to drive across the Dorsetshire heathland with ease, crushing bushes and hedges in its way, mounting banks and freely crossing minor potholes, protuberances and depressions.

“A track-laying version should be able to cross trenches, Minister”, Kipling advised as *‘Warrior’s’* 12pdr Armstrong-Whitworth breechloading cannon let off a salvo to obliterate a canvas and wood test target.

“Most impressive, General”, Herbert was already framing in his mind a favourable report to Cabinet when - to the shock and awe of all present - the mechanical leviathan shuddered under an unexpected thunderclap from deep within its bowels. A rush of hot steam and Victorium plasma discharged as the vessel lurched upward, before coming back to earth with a shudder felt by all anchored to the ground.

“Abandon ship!” up went the cry from a Scots engineer. “The engine’s can’ae take it Captain! The boiler’s gonna blow!”

But it didn’t ‘blow’. As the crew made their emergency disembarkation the uncontrolled and unmanned *HMLS ‘Warrior’* sped off at speed.

In an easterly direction...



III

Half an hour after the disaster - and the electric telegraph hummed, warning Wimborne, Poole and Bournemouth of the uncontrolled iron monster's advance at the - almost -unheard of - velocity of 30 miles per hour.

“The Constabulary will keep the populace away”, before his civilian paymaster General Kipling realised he now very much had egg on face. “At this speed, within an hour, its Victorium fuel will be exhausted”.

“It could be worse, I suppose”, Herbert knew his report on ‘*Warrior*’s development and exhibition potential would not now be entirely favourable.

“Report in, Sir”, Captain D’Urberville saluted smartly. “Good news. ‘*Warrior*’ will pass south of Wimborne and north of Poole” (given the circumstances he decided it best not to make some witty quip about any inherent trampling of the latter hive of scum and villainy an exercise in serendipitous urban redevelopment).

“Bournemouth?” Kipling feared for the integrity of the Empire’s premier respectable holiday resort.

“Should go just north, Sir. Nothing there by and large but heathland and rabbits until you reach The New Forest. When it’s trees, moss, rabbits and wild ponies”.

Yet this was not entirely the case. With Marianne absent in London Georgina felt the weight of responsibility devolve upon her, to her to hope the crazed and uncontrolled behemoth unleashed by the Army passed harmlessly away from her village construction site. But hope is never enough. Duty demanded she wait until a resolution was known for certain.

Sadly it was not to be.

“Bother!” David Tuck was careful to moderate his language in front of a gentlewoman and his young son. “It’s coming straight for us!”

Indeed it was. Ploughing up farmland and heathland in its wake the rogue *HMLS* ‘*Warrior*’ appeared on the horizon, its maniacal mechanical groan heralding approach in otherwise silence - save the trace noise of fleeing wildlife - of badgers, hedgehogs, rabbits, birds in flight, and the occasional deer or urgent black adder.

“It seems your Norwegian Blue was most perceptive, Michael”, David was phlegmatic in the face of danger.

“Perchance it will run out of steam before it reaches us?” Georgina hoped against logic.

“No”, Tuck senior knew better. “It will reach our site - destroy the work completed so far. It must be stopped”.

“How?” she knew they had not cannon - indeed wished to keep her ‘superpower’ secret and (if possible) avoid a public display that would leave her drained and unconscious.

Vulnerable...

“Its speed *has* slowed”, Tuck mused possibility.

“It must be running out of fuel, Father”, Michael noted. “You recall that article we shared on Victorium engines. In ‘*Practical Engineer*’?”

“I do indeed my boy. If I could but board it... Shut it down...”

“No!” Georgina implored. “It’s too dangerous!”

“I think not”, David responded with a confident smile as he removed his jacket, prepared to move toward the behemoth, to attempt the seemingly impossible.

“Mr Tuck...” Georgina began to protest. “David... Please”.

“Michael”, he boldly silenced her. “You are to see Miss Talbot to safety”.

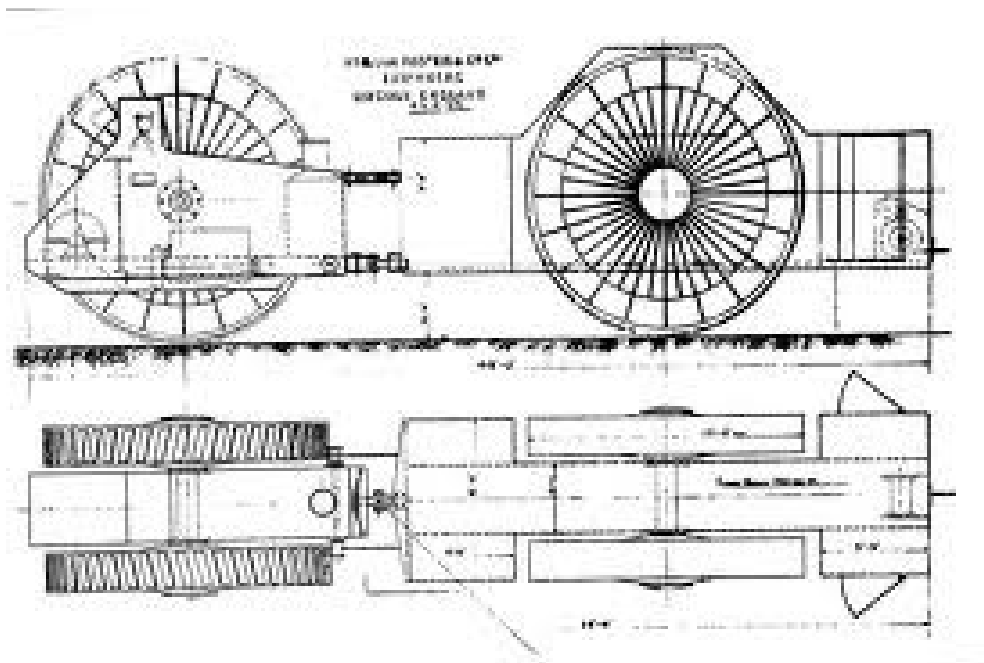
“But Father...”

“No ‘buts’, Son, it’s an order. Women and children first. The lady’s safety is paramount”.

“No!” Georgina attested. “It is too dangerous! I forbid it! We can rebuild the work done on the village thus far!”

“With respect, Miss Talbot, we both *know* a philanthropist’s resources are finite. To meet the specifications you have already committed all your resources...”

“No! You can’t!”



Stolen blueprints

“With respect, Miss Talbot, you appointed me site manager. It is therefore incumbent upon me to *manage* - to defend the site”.

Before she could protest further David handed his jacket to his dutiful son - and departed at speed toward the metal monster.

“Miss Talbot”, made of the same stern stuff as his father Michael indicated she should retreat. “If you please...”

“Master Tuck”, she politely responded as - heart beating with a heady mixture of fear, admiration and yet baser emotions - Georgina watched her hero. Moving first to the leviathan’s beam - then running to it - David Tuck approached the rogue device - leaping aboard to bravely scale the bridgework.

“You see, Miss Georgina”, Michael affirmed. “Father will stop it!”

And so, indeed, it seemed he would. Reaching the controls of ‘*Warrior*’ Tuck sought to disengage them - to shut down the engine.

But where the officers of Her Majesty’s Regiment of Landships had failed - so too did he. The unthinkable happened!

HMLS ‘Warrior’ suddenly picked up speed.

“Jump Father! Jump!” Michael shouted - but whether or not David Tuck heard will never be known. The tin machine lurched into the air and thence onward - throwing Tuck clear - to land with impact upon the hard ground of wasted Dorset heath.

“He’s not moving!” Georgina alarmed.

“Father!” Michael Tuck began to run towards his sole surviving parent.

“No! Wait!” Georgina knew her first priority must now be to keep the child safe. Realising she was unobserved she summoned her secret power - and a blast of mild electroetherplasm arced from her outstretched arm to catch young Michael Tuck on the back - send him sprawling - unconscious but safe.

No witnesses? The way was clear! Raising again her infernal mutation Georgina Talbot stretched forward her arms toward the mindless creation of an avaricious techno-military gone mad - and discharged!

The machine slowed first to walking pace - was now but a hundred yards from the building site that was her proto-model village. Weakened - but vexed and angry at what had transpired - Georgina discharged again - and this time the machine indeed rumbled to a halt - spluttered steam and Victorium - and finally died - slain by her secret superpower like St Georgina and the dragon.

“Ugh!” drained by her exertions Georgina Talbot fainted to the ground - fought for consciousness - secured it - and - summoning her reserves of - willpower ran forward.

“David!” forgetting for once all propriety she rushed over to her dear and devoted site manager. “David?” she feared.

“The... the machine?” he gasped.

“Halted”, kneeling to cradle his head on her lap she reassured.

“Michael?” he further entreated.

“Safe”, she exaggerated.

“My... my neck is broken”, he knew. “I’m done for. My sister... she... must care for my son”.

“I will ensure her safety”, tears in her eyes Georgina promised. “I...” she felt almost terminally weak from her discharge. “I... I love you”, she stuttered the forbidden truth.

“I know”, with a final smile David Tuck likewise recognised the emotion between them - between two lonely people of different classes - had been decently reciprocated. “I... I...”, he gasped, fought for life, but failed - taken up unto Him by the Lord.

“Oh no! *No!*” Georgina Talbot raged against the machine - against the cruel hand of fate - that in saving her village - her life’s work - she’d lost the only man she had ever loved.

“No”, she fought fatigue, “no”, the last thing she remembered before passing out was anguish - determination before her fall that if David’s life was to count for anything, she must use from here on her secret powers for good...

TO BE CONTINUED...



