

Mr. Snicker's Misadventure
by John Thornberry

UNCLE ISAAC SNICKERS, citizen of Gossippee, a charming little village some ways back in Connecticut, had finally made up his mind that it was high time for him to go to New York. He had been once, when he was a boy in a satin jacket and bone buttons, and never since. From that day forward to this very important one of his resolution, he had kept himself quite at home, while the great metropolis had gone on growing like a monstrous giant, as it is.

He bade his family a very hearty adieu, and jogged away out of the dooryard with the gray mare, to reach the distant railroad station. Everybody he met he wanted to tell of his projected trip, and at least to half of them he did. The cars took him to the boat,—one of the magnificent steamers that plough the length of the Sound,—on which he duly embarked not far from ten o'clock at night, prepared, carpet-bag in hand, to undertake a thorough survey of the premises before “turning in.”

It is needless to follow him about the decks of the steamer, smiling pleasantly at his efforts to observe all there was worth observing; certainly would it be improper to follow him into the ladies' cabin whither he made a successful sally, in his innocent eagerness to “find out jest how the hull concern was managed.” We will suffer him to go to bed and get up again, just as he was in the habit of doing at his own quiet home in Gossippee.

Early the next morning he was out of his berth, had washed himself thoroughly, and made his appearance on deck just as the sun began to foreshow signs of its ruddy coming in the east. He looked in the direction of sunrise with one eye shut and a corner of his large mouth elevated to match, and took out his big silver watch to set himself right to begin upon. And then he commenced the proper investigation of matters and things by daylight.

One after another the passengers came from their beds, numb and half-awake, looking as if neither the night's sleep nor the morning's wash had done them any good whatever. Some paced to and fro, passing Uncle Isaac continually. Some gathered in knots at the guards, and talked about the sloops in the stream, the houses on the shore, the white-looking fortifications, or the islands. In the distance lay the city, undistinguishable mass. Mr. Snickers generally kept his eyes fixed there, while his heart was wholly overwhelmed with the strange sense of its greatness.

In time the decks were black with the awakened passengers. Hell Gate was close by, and the shores were very near on either side. All began to crowd now at the guards, eager to see what there was worth their inspection. Few spoke at this juncture, for each one was wrapped in the silence of his own thoughts.

Presently there was a loud cry which startled everyone. All looked round to understand the trouble.

“I'm robbed!” shouted a man, with every look of terror depicted on his countenance.

Everybody instantly clapped his hand on his own pocket, to see if his condition was any better. It appearing pretty generally that no one else was in so unfortunate a predicament, all eyes thereupon began a survey of faces of their neighbors. A more suspicious congregation of individuals it would be difficult to find.

“I’m robbed of a pocketbook that contains seven hundred and fifty dollars!” exclaimed the loser, elevating his voice.

Everybody’s attention having been thus momentarily turned again to the unhappy traveler, a well-dressed man in black improved the opportunity to slip a bulky pocketbook that might have held exactly seven hundred and fifty dollars, into the coat skirts of Mr. Isaac Snickers! The most unfortunate gift of money he probably ever had in his life.

The alarm was given to the officers of the boat, and just as she came into the stream and made ready to enter her berth at the dock, her engines were stopped, and a small boat went ashore to bring an officer on board. He came up the gangway, looking grateful for such an opportunity to display his fine qualities at rogue catching.

“Search the passengers!” called out the captain, while the steam blowed away at its highest force.

Some remonstrated,—others muttered; but *all* finally gave in. Of course an honest man would have no fears. Innocence always holds up its head, and looks you straight in the face.

The officer went around, and the passengers severally turned their pockets inside out. As they were one by one disposed of, they were passed over to the other side of the boat, where they awaited the result in anxious silence. During that interval, it is fair to believe that every man’s countenance underwent quite as thorough a search as his pockets.

At last the man with the big star on his breast came to Uncle Isaac. There were many behind him, whose turn was yet to come, in case nothing was found upon him.

“O, you may search me,” said Mr. Snickers, holding out his arms as if he was about to be measured by the tailor, and looking with one eye over at the Jersey shores; “I aint got no money that don’t belong to myself,—I can tell ye!” And he could not help laughing with inward delight at the mere thought of the thing. He fancied it would be a good joke to repeat to the folks at home.

“What’s that, then?” demanded the officer, holding up the identical pocketbook which he had just picked out of his skirt.

“What’s that!” exclaimed Uncle Isaac, thoroughly terrified,—“God knows; I don’t!”

“My pocketbook,” cried the man who had lost it. “Seven hundred and fifty dollars in it, besides notes and papers! It’s mine, for I know it by the outside!”

A hasty examination proved the man's ownership, and his property was duly returned. All the passengers now began to crowd around the unhappy victim. The officer took him in his charge and the wheels of the steamer began to revolve again. There was a jam of persons, and a confusion of voices. Above them all could be heard the voice of Mr. Snickers,—“I never took that man's pocketbook! You can't say I ever did such a thing! My name's Snickers,—Isaac Snickers; and I live at Gossippee in Connecticut.”

“I can't help what your name is,” said the officer, gently trying to work his prisoner off into a corner. “You'd better try and keep a little quiet, my friend.”

“I shan't keep quiet, for I'm not the man you take me for. Good Christopher! To think o' my bein' taken for a thief!”—and he tore his hat from his head, and threw it in a mad passion down upon the deck. The spectators laughed. He stamped and cursed a little; though no one heard what he said, for again they set up a roar. “Served the old fellow right,” some of them remarked to some others.

“I'm a respect-er-ble man!” he said, extending both hands. “I'm an honest citizen! My name's Isaac Snickers,—as I told you before; and you'll find it in my hat there on the floor!”

Some of them picked it up, and found it was so. Strange that a regular thief should wear his name in his hat. But possibly not his own name. Ah, very likely.

At this juncture, just when wretched Uncle Isaac was thinking of the dear old delights of home, and wishing for his soul he had never thought of leaving it, the boat touched the wharf, and the long plank was thrown to its deck. The passengers made haste to rush over. Among the foremost of them, too, the well-dressed man in black, whose ready ingenuity in an emergency had brought Uncle Isaac into his present misery.

The report of the robbery had of course become spread around, as soon as it was known for what purpose the officer had boarded the boat; and the moment the passengers began to come ashore, there was another officer—a sly detective—in the crowd, unnoticed, but watching every face that passed him.

Suddenly he sprang from his position, and laid his hand on the shoulder of our interesting friend in black. “You're my prisoner,” said he.

The rogue fell back, turned pale, and tried to look the detective in the face.

“They've found the money on another fellow,” said the villain.

“Who said anything about any money?” returned the detective. “Let's go and see.”

The vigilant detective knew nothing of the success of the search, and he therefore had a right to conclude that any suspicious person who came ashore might be the guilty party. So he improved his earliest opportunity to reap what handful of harvest was offered him, and grabbed our quiet friend as aforesaid.

A crowd followed. The rogue was carried into the presence of his victim.

“Hallo, Sour!” saluted the other officer, seeing the gentleman in sable before him.” Did you come on in this boat?”

“I did,” he answered, with dignity. “What if I did, sir?”

“Then you robbed our friend there,” pointing to the owner of the pocketbook;” that’s all there is about that. I’m convinced that this man here is the wrong person. You took that money, and slipped it into our friend’s pocket, to screen yourself! I only wish I’d seen you when I first came on board!”

The rogue was dumb. He tried to look innocence, but it was nothing but blankness. He shuffled, and bullied, and evaded, and swore; and then he held up his wrists for a pair of steel bracelets, and was led away to the great delight of everybody in general, and Mr. Snickers in particular.

“Take that, then!” said honest Uncle Isaac, stepping up briskly to his turned back and delivering a vigorous kick with his new cowhides. “Next time, learn to let an honest citizen alone!”

The policemen interfered, and the crowd cheered. And Uncle Isaac, gathering up such “duds” as he had supplied himself with for his long contemplated trip, stepped with a light heart off the boat, and placed himself on board the early train from the foot of Canal Street for home; shaking off the very dust of his feet against the town, and hurrying back to old Connecticut again with all the speed of which steam is capable.

He declared that Gossippee is just the quietest and pleasantest village in the created world; and advises all his friends to avoid New York as they would—well, the old fellow who never stops to leave his card among his gentlemen acquaintance. New York will never see Mr. Isaac Snickers again.

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