

## *Good Mr. Sprue*

“Hurry up there and get your tickets, gentlemen!” shouted a man in a blue coat and brass buttons, with the company’s badge on his lapel.

There was a general scramble for the head of the line, and a hurried falling back to the less enlightened places by those who failed to secure the first.

I never had any good luck in gaining a good place in a crowd. A tall man with a high hat, always would go between me and whatever sight was to be seen. If it rained at the circus, the inevitable fat woman with the green umbrella, always bounded my horizon. In the rush to hear a popular preacher I have been fortunate enough to secure a camp stool at the far end of the room, but most commonly have to put up with “standing room” in the third or fourth rank, catching here and there a word of the discourse, but not a glimmer of the sense.

This time I feared as usual. Elbowed out at every attempt to gain a better lodgement, I found myself at last at the extreme end of the queue.

“Hurry up, I say!” kept shouting he in blue and brass.

But in spite of all, the line shortened slowly. I was getting nervous. The next day was Thanksgiving; which I had agreed to spend at Deacon Patchin’s between whose daughter Polly and myself certain tender negotiations were then in active progress. To miss the train involved the choice of either giving up my visit or waiting several hours and arriving just in time to find Polly in the pouts and taking a longing look at the cold remains of that special turkey of whose growth in fatness Polly’s postscripts had kept me from time to time advised.

“Hurry up! Less than a minute till the gate closes!” admonishes the blue and brazen official, as at last I reached the ticket window.

“Ticket to Hugginsport,” I said hurriedly.

“Two dollars!” replied the ticket man, slapping down his stamp on a piece of card-board with the heel of his hand.

“I’ve lost my pocketbook,” I exclaimed, withdrawing the hand sent in search of it. Here was a fix! I had started with a liberal supply of the one thing needful for Thanksgiving—at least so far as material pleasures go—and here I was without a penny to pay my fare, and not half a minute of spare time.

I looked around helplessly.

“I perceive your embarrassment, sir,” said a grave looking gentleman, whose white choker and long skirted coat left no doubt of his calling. “I perceive your embarrassment, sir, and shall be happy to relieve you of it. Get your ticket out of this; you can hand me the change and remit the rest.”

As he spoke he placed a twenty dollar bill in my hand.

“But, my dear sir,” I began.

“Pray don’t waste any time in compliments. My name is Rev. Speedwell Sprue, of Chapelion, to which address you can remit the trifling sum advanced. I ask no better guarantee than your countenance.”

“I accept your favor,” I replied, “with warmest thanks. My name is Hodish Trimbley, white goods clerk with Twist & Bobbin, of this city.”

“Come, sir, do you wish the ticket or not?” demanded the man at the window, with his thumb on the spring that held up the slide.

I threw down the bill. He hastily counted out the change and handed it and the ticket. The former I passed to the obliging stranger, whose hand I had barely time to press in parting, as I left him waiting for another train.

The gateman was in the act of closing the passage and the last bell was ringing as I hurried through and jumped aboard, with views of human nature considerably elevated by the trusting confidence shown by the Rev. Speedwell Sprue—though I doubted whether it would do to sell white goods on the same credit system.

From Mr. Sprue and his childlike faith my thoughts gradually returned to Polly Patchin, and I had already laid the ground plans of several fancy cottages, in which with love and Polly to lend their charms, I could laugh at the proudest prince in his palace.

“Dickerville!” sang out the conductor, as the whistle blew and the train slowed up at the first stopping place.

Two men with lanterns—it was a night train—came bustling through the car scanning the passengers closely.

“Ho! This looks like him,” said one of them holding his lantern to my face.

“Fills the bill exactly,” cried the other, glancing from me to a paper in his hand.

“Come, sir,” he continued placing a hand roughly on my shoulder. “If I am not mistaken it was you who bought the last ticket for this train.”

“It was,” I answered, looking up astonished.

“And paid for it with a twenty dollar bill,” he added, “receiving the change.”

I acknowledged the fact but with no abatement of surprise.

“That bill,” he proceeded, “was a counterfeit, and we’ve been telegraphed to arrest you.”

I endeavored to expostulate, and explained as well as my confusion would permit, the circumstances under which I had got the note.

“A likely story!” was the sneering comment; “there’s so many good Mr. Sprue’s you see, going about lending money to total strangers. What did you do with the change now?”

“Handed it back to Mr. Sprue,” I answered.

“A clever dodge,” said one of the men, as the two exchanged winks.

“Come along!” they commanded, and without ceremony I was hustled from the train, dragged to a neighboring caboose and locked up.

Next morning I was taken before a jolly-looking magistrate whose face was a guarantee that I should at least have a fair hearing.

“Well, young man, what have you got to say to this?” he began.

I was proceeding with my story earnestly, when to my great joy who should enter but my kind friend, the Rev. Speedwell Sprue, in company with a stranger of a very different appearance.

“Oh, Mr. Sprue, how glad I am to see you!” I exclaimed. “A word from you will clear up this unfortunate affair.”

To my great chagrin, Mr. Sprue, instead of promptly answering my appeal, turned aside and quite ignored my presence. But his companion promptly stepped forward.

“Do you recognize this?” he asked, placing in my hand an article taken from his pocket.

“I do!” I cried; “It is my own pocket-book.”

“Of which you were robbed by that person,” he replied, pointing to the reverend Sprue, “whose real name is Ahab Dawks, a noted thief and forger, whom I’ve been for some time looking for. I witnessed his performance at the depot last night, and saw how, after stealing your pocket-book, he made you the instrument of putting off a bad note that he might pocket the change. Though I’m a detective, I didn’t interfere, wishing to follow Dawks to the den in which he works and keeps his tools, and knowing the worst that could happen would be your temporary detention. This morning I hurried on, with the double purpose of securing your release and your identification of Mr. Dawks.”

I was too late to see the turkey in his glory, but Polly—bless her!—had saved me up a nice piece, and the story of my adventure was the event of that Thanksgiving night. Everybody laughed but Polly, who—again bless her!—was quite indignant at the wrongs I had suffered.

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