

## *A Romance of a Railway Carriage*

It was a close and sultry afternoon towards the end of July; the Dover Express was about to start from the London Bridge terminus of the Southeastern Railway, and there was the usual bustle and clatter attendant upon such an occurrence

Amongst the intending passengers might be seen on the platform a stout, silver-haired, cheery-looking, elderly gentleman, whose spotless broadcloth and massive gold chain (to which was attached a valuable repeater), and, above all, whose conscious air of responsibility proclaimed the man of substance. He was, in fact, the senior partner of a wealthy and well-known firm of Kentish brewers, and was taking with him to Sandwich a large sum of money, which he had come to London on purpose to collect. This passenger appeared to possess that sort of amiable inquisitiveness and restlessness which is a not uncommon attribute of gentlemen who have passed the Rubicon of a certain age. His first care was to secure a copy of the latest edition of the *Times*, his next to recruit himself with a biscuit and a glass of old sherry at the refreshment bar, and finally to walk up and down the platform, at a somewhat brisk pace, being evidently unwilling to sit down within the narrow limits of a railway carriage until it became a matter of positive necessity that he should do so.

While he thus exercised himself, the eye of the worthy old gentleman was suddenly caught by a large staring printed bill on the wall, and adjusting his gold-rimmed spectacles, he proceeded to peruse it. It ran thus:

“Murder! £200 Reward!—The above is hereby offered by Her Majesty's Government to any person or persons who shall give such information as may lead to the apprehension and conviction of Charles Wintringham (*alias* Carlo Bertolacci), suspected and accused of committing divers barbarous murders, for the purpose of committing robbery, on the various lines of railway throughout the United Kingdom. The said Charles W. (*alias* Carlo B.) is 22 years of age, and is short of stature, of fair complexion, has blue eyes, and good teeth. His hands and feet are remarkably small and well shaped, and his manner winning, persuasive, and courteous. Whoever will give such information as may lead to the apprehension, will receive the full reward.”

It was also particularly stated that C. W. had a mole beneath his chin.

“Bless me!” ejaculated the brewer ; “what an Adonis! But, dear me, murdering people in railroad carriages —how remarkably nervous I feel, to be sure. Here, guard!”

A guard who happened to be near, scenting a probable half-crown, immediately advanced.

“Guard, I must have a carriage to myself.”

“Train will be very full, sir. Where are you for, sir?”

“Sandwich,” was the reply.

“Change at Minster for Sandwich and Deal,” said the guard, instinctively repeating the well-known formula.

“Yes, yes, I know about that, I should think, by this time,” interrupted the old gentleman, impatiently. “The question is, can I have a carriage, or not?” said he, producing a sovereign from his pocket, and showing it surreptitiously to the guard.

The eyes of the official brightened up amazingly.

“Follow me sir,” said he, “and I’ll see what can be done.”

The old gentleman followed his conductor, and the result was, as it usually is, that the golden key, which unlocks every door, unlocked for the brewer the door of the reserved first-class carriage.

“There sir,” said the guard, locking him in: “now you’re all right. But I forgot; you must change at Ashford for Minster, as this is a Dover carriage.”

“Oh, I know that,” said the old gentleman. “I know the line well.”

“All right, sir,” said the guard. “No offence?”

“Oh, certainly not,” said the other, “Much obliged to you.”

Putting his hand to his cap, the guard then departed.

The old gentleman unfolded his *Times*, and began to look through the latest doings on the stock exchange and in the hop market. The moment for the departure of the train had almost arrived, the noise from the engine getting up its steam was almost deafening; late passengers rushed to and fro, and bewildered porters strove in vain to satisfy their demands. Suddenly the smiling, obsequious face of the guard appeared at the window of the carriage in which the brewer sat alone in his glory.

“Oh, I beg pardon, sir,” said he, “I really beg pardon; but could you allow one person in there with you?”

“Certainly not,” said the old gentleman, looking up testily from his paper. “What did I pay my sovereign for?”

“But you see, sir,” said the guard, deprecatingly, “this is a lady who—”

“Oh, a lady! Well—in that case—” began the old man, somewhat mollified.

“I would not intrude upon the gentleman against his will,” said a low, sweet voice, “I would rather lose the train.”

“Indeed madam,” said the brewer, looking at the lovely face before him, “I shall be honored. Open the door, guard.”

The triumphant guard unlocked the door, and the fair visitor, with a gracious bow to her elderly companion, took her seat. In another instant the official had received a second golden douceur, doors slammed with a crash, the engine, released from its enforced restraint, gave a shriek, and the train dashed out of the station on its mission across the lovely county of Kent.

Involuntarily the brewer stole a glance at his beautiful companion. She was dressed in a costly toilet, which set off her slight and elegant figure to great advantage. Her features were singularly lovely, and her dark hair formed an exquisite contrast to her blue eyes and fair complexion.

“If I were 30 years younger,” thought the brewer, “I should— wheugh!”

Presently, after those numberless and nameless civilities had been exchanged between the lady and her companion which are almost inevitable when well-bred persons are traveling together, they commenced conversing together like old acquaintances. The gentleman appeared much pleased and gratified with the attention which his companion paid to all he said, whilst the lady on her part threw off the air of timidity and distrust which had at first sat so well upon her.

“It is very pleasant traveling by the express,” remarked the brewer; “one is not jolted as by the ordinary trains.”

“No, it is as you say, extremely pleasant,” said his companion. “Besides, an accident rarely happens to the express.”

“Oh, madam, pray do not speak of accidents,” said the brewer.

“You are nervous, then, sir?” said the lady.

“Somewhat so, I confess; and besides—”

“Besides?—” she said, interrupting.

“Well, there are other accidents besides those which may happen to the train itself,” he added.

“What accidents, sir?” asked the lady, with an air of interest.

“Well, madam, since the affair of Muller and Mr. Briggs—”

“Oh, I understand,” said the lady, with a light and musical laugh; “you are afraid of being murdered, sir.”

“H'm, well—d”

“Oh, pray do not make any excuses, sir,” said the lady; “I can understand that persons may be cowardly, when—d”

“Cowardly, madam!” said the poor old gentleman, somewhat disconcerted.

“Certainly,” she replied, laughing more than ever; “is it not so, to fear that you are to become a second Mr. Briggs? Such occurrences do not take place now.”

“Not take place!” cried the brewer, opening his eyes; “why, on that very platform I was reading—”

“Oh, oh! yes, I read it myself,” said the lady.

“You did?” said the old gentleman.

“Assuredly,” was the reply; “why not?”

“You see, then, that such things do take place, madam.”

“Well, perhaps so,” she admitted ; “but they are exceptional, sir.”

“I might prove one of the exceptions,” said he.

“So you might, sir,” returned the lady, with a faintly ironical smile.

“You see, then, that there is ground for nervousness, on the part of an old man,” said the brewer.

“Ah, that is why you were locked in this carriage,” said the lady.

“Exactly,” he replied.

“Oh, I comprehend,” she continued. “On my part, I am not nervous at all.”

“You are not?” he cried.

“No. Why should I be so, when I have you to protect me?” She smiled again ironically, and the old gentleman bowed.

The conversation then turned on different subjects. Presently, December and May partook of a sandwich together and; by-and-by, the train stopped at Tunbridge.

Here a tall, military-looking, and rather handsome man was seeking to find a place in the train. He must proceed, he said, at once, on business of great importance, for he was already late, having come thus far on his way to Dover by a previous train, which had unfortunately gone without him whilst he had been taking a hasty meal at the refreshment bar.

“I must and will proceed,” he said calmly, but firmly, to the guard, who in vain protested that the train was already quite full.

“The company are bound to take me on!” he cried.

“There's no room, sir,” said the guard.

“We will see. Ha!” he ejaculated, looking into the carriage in which sat the brewer and his companion, “here is room,” he added; and he frowned at the guard.

“You cannot go in there, sir!” said the latter, in great confusion.

“Not go in ! Well, we will see,” said he; and he coolly took a key from his pocket and unlocked the door of the carriage, stepping briskly in.

The guard stared in amazement.

“He has got a key!” he ejaculated to himself. “Oh, he must be a director! Beg pardon, sir!”

But there was no time for explanation, for the train was already on its way.

The brewer frowned, and looked cross at this fresh addition to the company. Not so the lady, who at the voice and sight of the new-comer had at first turned slightly pale. She merely gave a passing glance at him, and recommenced the perusal of Henry Danton. As for the stranger, he settled himself down in the opposite seat to her, and taking from his pocket a late edition of the *Standard*, became apparently absorbed in its columns.

It may be here mentioned that the brewer, who had at first been seated opposite to his fair traveling companion, had latterly, for the purpose of indulging in his usual afternoon nap, changed his seat to the further corner of the carriage. His first seat, then, being vacant, was appropriated by the newcomer.

On, on rushed the train, through corn fields and hop grounds, at a steady, even pace, which prevented its rapidity from being felt. Now some openmouthed rustic stood at a half opened gate, staring after the smoking, puffing engine as it tore along; now some covey of frightened partridges rose from the edge of the embankment, or a startled colt galloped away from the vicinity of the (in its eyes) resistless monster that appeared to be approaching him. And still on, steadily on, without oscillation or curve, sped the Dover express.

The military man, or at least he who appeared to be such, was steadily regarding his opposite neighbor over the top of his newspaper, while apparently engaged in reading. She, unconscious of the scrutiny, was absorbed in the fortunes of the scoundrel-hero of her novel, and the old brewer snored audibly in the further corner.

The face of the military-looking man expressed perplexity and doubt. He was a personage of from 50 to 60 years of age, with an upright carriage, crisp, short, curling black hair, intermixed

with gray, and peculiarly intelligent and piercing black eyes. For some miles he appeared to be debating with himself, and occasionally, with an air of indecision, put his hand into his coat-tail pocket.

“The opportunity is good,” he muttered; “and yet—”

At last, when the train was within a few miles of Ashford, he appeared to have made up his mind.

“I will risk it,” he said to himself ; “yes, I will risk it.”

Click, click!

The military man had suddenly withdrawn his hand from his pocket, in which it had so long been fumbling, and the old brewer woke up with a terrified start. The fair lady of this story, with a pale but resolute look on her face, was sitting handcuffed!

“What—what is this?” gasped the brewer, only half awake, and turning in bewildered amazement to the military stranger. “Who are you, sir?”

“Inspector T—, of the detective force,” was the reply.

“And that lady,” said the old gentleman; “what has she done?”

“Are you sure she is a lady?” inquired the inspector, with a quiet smile.

“Oh, who could doubt that?” said the brewer.

“I doubted it, sir,” was the quick reply; “and well for you I did, for I have decidedly saved your life.”

“Saved my life!” cried the brewer, in extreme astonishment.

“Yes,” said the detective.

“But how?” inquired the brewer.

“Look at that lady, as you call her,” said the officer. “Did you ever see anyone like her?”

“I?” stammered the old gentleman. “Oh, never.”

“Or read of anyone like her,” continued the inspector.

“Never,” cried the other.

“You have not read these handbills all down the line, then?” said Inspector T.

“What handbills?” inquired the brewer.

“Why, concerning the recent murders in railway carriages.”

“Yes, I have read them,” he replied.

“Well?” said the officer.

“I cannot see how that concerns this lady.”

Even the prisoner smiled at such obtuseness.

“Look, then,” said the inspector, removing the prisoner's bonnet, and with it a mass of dark braided hair, beneath which showed a curly golden head. “Does a light break in upon you now?”

“Oh, oh!” murmured the poor brewer growing deadly pale. “So that this lady is, then, it appears—”

“Charles Wintringham, *alias* Carlo Bertolacci,” said the detective.

“Good heavens!” exclaimed the old gentleman.

“You see, then, the danger you have escaped,” continued the officer. “You were positively asleep.”

“Ah, ah!” said the brewer, shuddering. “How can I ever repay you?”

“Oh, I have only done my duty,” returned the inspector. “This young rascal (who could ever suppose such a face could cover the heart of a demon?) was doubtless about to escape to the continent.”

A slight contraction of the prisoner's face told the detective that he had surmised correctly.

“Which,” continued the inspector, “but for an accident, he would have done.”

The criminal elevated his eyebrows ; the old man looked inquiringly at the detective.

“Yes,” continued the latter, “I say but for an accident; for, in fact, I suspected his design, and had taken the first train for Dover. By a misapprehension of the time, on my part, I was left behind at Tunbridge, while taking some refreshment. So that it is a mere chance I encountered my prisoner in this train.”

The young man ground his teeth in desperation.

“But—how did you know him?” asked the brewer.

“Ah! you think it was impossible to detect him in that disguise,” said the officer. “Well, I will admit he makes as pretty a girl as I ever saw in my life. I will tell you how I detected him. In the first place, I was struck by his sweet low voice, too deep for a woman, in my opinion.”

“Ah!” said the brewer.

“Then I observed many other little things,” continued the other; “I have had long experience in such matters, you know, sir. And at last—”

“Yes, yes, at last?” interrupted the brewer.

“Well, he untied his bonnet-strings, on account of the heat, and I saw—”

“Well, well?” again interrupted the old gentleman.

The inspector pointed significantly to the prisoner's chin.

“Ah!” said the old gentleman, again turning pale; “the mole?”

“Precisely so. You have hit it,” said the inspector. “But here we are.”

The train had stopped at Ashford. Here the inspector removed his prisoner, to await a return to London.

As for the worthy old brewer, after sliding a £5 note into the detective's hand, he changed his carriage to proceed to Minster, feeling himself quite a hero of romance.

“Ah, ah!” he muttered, ensconcing himself in a carriage—which he took care this time should be full of people —“what a tale I shall have to tell Margaret tonight!”

Let us hope that he reached home safely.

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