

An Old Offender
by Capt. Charles Howard

When Carl Binkley, the private detective of the Macacheek air line company led Courtney Tenney to the altar, he shaved his face until no hirsute appendage, save a fine blonde moustache remained thereon. This whim prevented his recognition by several acquaintances on the day of his wedding, and he and his bride enjoyed more than one outburst of merriment at their expense.

The wedding tour planned by “Bink,” as the [employees] and officers of the road familiarly called him, promised to prove quite extensive, and the directors placed a palace car at his disposal.

But he preferred, and so did his bride, to travel like the rest of the people, and so on the afternoon of the wedding day, they stepped on board of the train amid the good-byes of a host of relatives and friends. They expected to reach their destination at one o’clock on the following morning, and for the sake of Courtney who had a horror of sleeping coaches, the bridegroom refused an offered favor from Scott, the conductor.

As the train rolled westward, the sun sank to rest, and the night stars peeped out again in the sky. It was a beautiful mid-Autumn night, and the cool breeze ever and anon blew the yellow leaves against the windows of the coaches.

“Carl, what if an old offender should board the train—I mean a man for whom you have been looking?”

The detective looked down into the smiling face of his newly made wife and smiled himself.

“Well, I don’t know what I would do, Courtney,” he answered; “but I suppose I would arrest him, take him to prison, and let you finish your wedding tour alone.”

“How jolly that would be!” Courtney laughed, “I really wish such an event would occur. I should be rid of you at least for a time, and I’d have the jolliest wedding tour ever written of.”

“I’d like to see you roughing it alone with your three trunks and groomless!” replied Carl, as the brakeman opened the door and shouted “Bloomfield” at the top of his lungs.

At the almost deserted station of the inland town the train stopped long enough to permit two men to board it, and seat themselves in the car that bore the newly wedded.

The new passengers were tolerably well dressed, and passingly good looking. They occupied one seat a short distance behind the detective, and almost directly beneath the lamp that afforded a miserable light.

A detective is constantly watching human faces, and after a while he reads them as he would an open book. Thus it was with Carl Binkley.

When the two men entered the car his eyes were turned upon them, and followed them to their seat.

By and by the conductor collected their fare, and the detective followed him from the car.

“Where are those fellows going?” he asked.

“To Terre Haute,” was the reply. “Do they strike you unfavorably?”

“Moderately so,” said Bink. “Send a man in to trim the lamp above them.”

Then the detective returned to his bride, who thought that something strange was going on, and a minute later a brakeman entered and proceeded to trim the light in the coach.

Binkley did not appear to watch the two men; but nevertheless his eyes were upon them, and before they moved back into a shadier seat he had spotted one, if not both.

“Courtney, I am afraid your wish is about to come true,” he whispered to his wife.

She looked up surprised at the solemnity of his manner.

“Why, Carl?”

“An old offender has boarded the train,” he replied, “and it is my duty to attend to him. I am certain of my man, though I have not seen him for two years, and his face, smooth then, is bearded now. Jack Hawk has repeatedly committed depredations on our line, and we can send him to the penitentiary with ease. But you see Courtney, you must catch a man before you hang him, and according to this truism Jack has escaped punishment. I must attend to him, save the company further losses, and put several hundred dollars in my pocket. He suspects nothing yet, I believe. I think he has not recognized me, and I have no doubt that his companion is an old offender, like himself.

The young wife heard her husband through, and then, with wifely fear, asked:

“Is he a dangerous character, Carl?”

“Well, yes,” was the reply; “but he’s one of those fellows who submit gracefully when they see great odds against them. Of course, I shan’t attempt the arrest alone. I’ll go forward and see the boys in the express car. Do you watch Jack while I am gone, Courtney. If he has recognized me, which is not likely, as I do not think he has seen me more than twice, he may attempt to play one of his tricks. Here,” and Courtney felt a small revolver dropped into her hand. “Do not attempt to use this unless you think that he is going to escape. He’s up to all kinds of tricks, and I consider him the shrewdest villain outside of prison.”

Courtney’s hand trembled a little when she hid the weapon in her pocket, and Carl rose and carelessly left the car.

“We’re booked for Jeffersonville, if he catches us,” said one of the twain in the seat behind the lamp.

“We are, without fail, Jack,” replied his companion. “Do you really think he knows us?”

“He’s recognized me, sure, and he may have spotted you. But it’s all the same thing. If he wants me he’ll not let you go. Why, I knew him as soon as I set my eyes on him, and I thought he would not know me, as I’ve let my beard grow. He sent that fellow in here to trim the lamps, so he could get a better view of our faces. I saw through the trick when the boy took the first lamp out of its socket. Oh, I tell you, Byrd, it’s all day with us if we don’t outwit that eagle-eyed chap.”

“Of course it is,” said the second man, doggedly. “I didn’t look for him on the road to-night. And he’s going on his wedding trip, I suspect.”

“Just so; but that wouldn’t stop him if he wanted to catch a man,” said Jack Hawk. “And then he’s been wanting me for the last two years. Look here! this train doesn’t stop again till it runs into Terre Haute. If we’re on board then, we’re sure to be gobbled. He’ll post the men in the express and baggage cars, and they’ll proceed to cut off every avenue of escape.”

“If they do, there’ll be bloody work,” grated Hawk’s comrade. “I’m not going to be taken. It would be a twenty years’ term for me.”

“And a life residence at Jeffersonville for Jack Hawk,” said the worthy one who boasted of that name.

“We must escape,” said Byrd McDonaldson. “Ring the bell and when the train slacks we’ll leave it.”

“’Twouldn’t do, Byrd,” he said. “Scott is forward with Bink, and at the first tap of the bell we’d have the posse upon us.”

“Then it’s all up with us!” said the Scotchman almost ready to despair.

“No; wait here for me.”

As he spoke, Jack Hawk left the seat and walked forward.

Courtney Binkley saw him pass her and leave the car by the forward door. She felt that [he] was up to some trick, but concluded to wait to see what it was.

She soon dismissed the thought of his leaping from the train, which, being as it was the express, was running at terrible speed, and believed that he would not desert his companion in crime.

Jack Hawk stepped upon the platform of the forward car, and drew a rope from his pocket. One end of it he fastened to the knob of the door, and the other end, after making the cord taught, he secured to the strong railing of the car. Satisfied with his work, he next drew a knife, and severed the bell rope, which he prevented from slipping into the cars.

Then he stooped over the coupling, a smile of triumph on his face.

“I can outwit the best detective on the globe,” he said to himself above a whisper, and a moment later he arose, having successfully accomplished the work of separating the cars.

Then he sprang to the brake, and presently the speed of the rear coach began to diminish, while the greater part of the train, with newly acquired velocity, darted on.

He re-entered the coach, and sat down beside his partner.

“We’re loose,” he whispered. “The train is a mile ahead now. We are stopping. Come! Now is the time. Who says I can’t beat Bink?”

The men left their seats as Courtney, who had been looking out of the window, dropped back into her seat, and put her hand on Carl’s revolver.

The trick which Jack Hawk had played was apparent to her, and the two men had almost reached the rear of the car when she arose and cried:

“Stop where you are, villains! I’ll kill the first man who attempts to leave this car without my orders. You two rascals will oblige me dropping into the seats where you now stand, and remaining there until promptly disposed of.”

Startled at the unexpected interruption of their plans, Jack Hawk and his companion exchanged pale looks and glanced down the aisle at the little woman clad in bridal robes who pointed the deadly revolver at their breasts.

By this time the car had come to a halt, and the other passengers, comprehending the situation, were rising. Already other pistols were exhibited, and the villains saw that their game was balked.

“Let us be men,” said Hawk to McDonaldson, as he dropped into a seat. “When the odds are against me I always submit. That woman would shoot at the drop of a hat. Shoot is in her eye!”

A minute later the two worthies were seated, and two “drummers” guarded them. Of course, all knew that the train would “back” when the absence of the several coaches was discovered, and, in a short time, it was announced as returning.

When the detective came into the car he kissed his brave little wife, and secured the two villains, who submitted like lambs. He acknowledged that Jack Hawk had outwitted him, but said, smilingly, that the best and bravest member of the Binkley family had proved too much for the old offender.

At Terre Haute the villains were handed over to the sheriff, and as Jack had been concerned in several murders, he received a life sentence, while his companion went to Jeffersonville for a long term.

Binkley [found] himself everywhere congratulated on the coolness of his wife, who still boasts, as well she may, of her capture of Jack Hawk and his criminal associate.

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