

## *The Haunted State-Room*

“Well, I don’t know what to say about it,” said the old gentleman. “I don’t pretend to account for it. I’m not a spiritualist, nor do I believe in ghosts, but if you’d ask me whether I’d sleep again in state-room number 24, on the *Mehetibel Boggs*, I’d say no. You couldn’t pay me to do it.

“I’d been down the Hudson, to see to some business. And I was on my way back again to Cooksackie, and the *Mehetibel Boggs* stopped there, and I took passage on her, and as she was crowded I felt myself quite lucky when I had my state-room check safe in my pocket, and knew that I should have it safe to myself, for the upper berth had been made a sort of linen closet of, and evidently wasn’t intended to be slept in at all. I had my portmanteau and a lot of bundles with me, and I carried them in and locked them up, and sat out on the forward deck until the supper gong sounded. Then I remembered some English mustard seed that I’d promised my wife I’d take before every meal—for I’m troubled with indigestion—and I went into the state-room to get it, for it was right on top of everything else in my portmanteau.

“It was getting quite dark, and after I’d swallowed the seed and was going back, I looked over my shoulder, as one is apt to do in going out of a narrow door, and I saw that some one was lying on my bed.

“‘Hallo!’ cried I. ‘Who is there?’

“I heard a little rustling sound and then I felt that perhaps I might have made a mistake. So I stepped out into the cabin and called a waiter.

“‘Is this the right state-room?’ I asked, pointing to the door and showing him my check.

“‘Yes, sir,’ said he. ‘That’s yours, sir.’

“‘Well, there’s some one in there,’ said I.

“‘No business to be there, sir,’ said he. Then he passed by me and went in. ‘Nobody here, sir,’ said he.

“I looked in. There certainly was no one there this time. The light had been lit behind the glass shield and I could see quite plainly. He had slipped out of the window perhaps, and if so he might get in there again.

“I fastened the window well, but still I couldn’t help expecting to find him there when I returned.

“I did. I never went to bed until eleven o’clock that night; but the moment I opened the door I saw him. He lay just as I had seen him, and he had a waiter’s white jacket on.

“‘Hallo!’ cried I. ‘This is *my* state-room! What do you want here?’

“I reached forward and made a grab at his jacket, but all I caught in my hand was my own duster that I had thrown over the bed.

“‘Old goose,’ said I, ‘you’d better get some spectacles if you are losing your sight like this.’

“Then I undressed and turned in. I went to sleep about as quickly as a man could, and I suppose I slept an hour or so, when I roused up with a sort of feeling of fright upon me that I couldn’t understand.

“I opened my eyes and looked about me; and I didn’t quite like it when I saw a negro waiter standing at the foot of my bed. He was a young, boyish-looking fellow with a round face, and he wore his white jacket, but the way he stood staring at me wasn’t pleasant. I was out of my bed in a minute, and my hand was on the door, I found it was locked. I got it open in a jiffy, I can tell you, and was out in the cabin again. An officer was just passing by.

“‘Here, sir,’ said I. ‘One of your waiters is in my state-room, and, moreover, he got there by no fair means, for the door was locked. I’ve shut him in. Now, you can take him out.’”

“The officer pushed past me and jerked the door open.

“‘Walk out, you rascal!’ cried he. ‘Why, there’s nobody here, sir, and your window is tied on the inside with your own handkerchief. You’ve been dreaming!’

“Well, after I had looked into the upper berth amongst the folded linen, and into the place under the lower one, I agreed that I must have been; but I wasn’t sleepy any more. I dressed myself, and sat down upon my portmanteau, and whether you’ll believe me or not, fifteen minutes afterward I saw the waiter lying in the spot I had left. He lay on his face, as before, and I did not disturb him. I just got up and slipped away. I sat on the deck all night, but now and then I had the curiosity to peep into the room. There he lay until five o’clock. Then a rooster they had somewhere on the boat began to crow, and the gray light to change to pink, and I peeped in again. The cabin was quite light, and it was empty.

“I took breakfast with the captain before leaving the boat—the captain and four or five others; and I said to him:

“‘Captain, either you’ve got a madman for a passenger or you have the slyest darkie living for a waiter.’

“‘How is that?’ said he.

“So I told him. He listened, nodding all the while, then he turned to the officer at his right:

“‘Mr. Sparks,’ says he, ‘haven’t I given orders that number 24 was not to be used as a sleeping-place any longer?’

“‘Well, yes sir—but all the other berths were full,’ says Mr. Sparks.

“‘Have it altered into a linen closet,’ said the captain—‘and give this gentleman back the price of his state-room.’

“‘Then you think—’ I began.

“I don’t allow myself to think,’ said the captain. ‘I *know* that three years ago one waiter murdered another in that very state-room. I know we found him lying on the bed face downwards, and I know that every passenger who has slept in 24 since that night has told me the story I’ve heard from you. I don’t try to explain it. I simply say, let no more passengers sleep in 24.’”

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