

## *A Quiet Bedfellow*

by Judge Clark

I don't think the trains on the Balaamsport and Hinnomdale Railroad ever *did* make connection at Skimptown. Some said the secret was that old Titefist, the president of the road, conspired with himself, as keeper of the Scantprog House, to add to the revenues of the latter by stopping travelers on the highway.

Be that as it may, I made it a rule, when I had occasion to go by that line, to make allowance for several hours' detention at Skimptown. Hence I was not surprised one night, on reaching that impassable point, at hearing the conductor call out:

"Ten minutes late!—no up train till four in the morning!"

Old Titefist's ugly eyes, that looked like a pair of faded dogwood blossoms, they showed so much of their bleary whites, twinkled with pleasure as he witnessed the rush of grumbling passengers, each anxious to secure the least wretched of the Scantprog's wretched quarters.

"Must double you up tonight, gents," said old Tite. "Down train missed connection, too; so, you see, we're pretty crowded."

And the old sinner went on taking in money with both hands, and turning over his hapless guests to be stowed away, two and two, like the unclean beasts in the Bible.

"Can put you with nice elderly gent—single room with double bed," said Tite, as I crowded forward and laid down the required sum. "You're lucky, too—only vacancy left—rest'll have to rough it on the floor. Elderly gent came on down train. Put young gent with him, but lucky for you, young gent got up after an hour or so, and left by private conveyance."

With a grunt, not exactly of satisfaction, I followed a ragged boy and an inch of candle to an apartment at the door of which the boy tapped. No answer coming, my conductor opened the door and left me to enter, handing me the bit of candle by way of *livery of seisin*.

The "elderly gent" lay at the back of the bed, with his face to the wall, evidently sound asleep. Not wishing to disturb him, I hurried off my clothes, blew out the light, and lay down quietly.

I had never been partial to bedfellows. Two-thirds of those with whom it had been my fortune to sustain that relation either snored or kicked. The "elderly gent" did neither. He lay as still as a mouse; and I thanked my stars and old Tite for the luck I was in.

And here I may as well inform the reader that I was on my way to be married. It will enable him to appreciate how much obliged I felt to the old gentleman for not disturbing my reflections. I went over to myself the marriage service—recalled what the minister would have to say and my own and Margie's parts respectively. How I chuckled over the place where the word "obey" comes in, and thought how poutingly the little vixen would say it.

After several false starts, I fell asleep at last, just sound enough to be in that happiest of earthly states—that of dreamy half consciousness.

A plague on the diabolical voice that recalled me to waking, yawning reality!

“Passengers for the four o’clock train!”

I “started like a guilty thing, upon a fearful summons.” One’s first impression, under such circumstances, always is, that he is ten minutes too late; his second, that unless he makes haste, he will be.

I would have called my bedfellow, but I knew he was to go by the down train, which didn’t leave till an hour later. And it would have been a sin to torment him before his time. He still lay with his face to the wall, as quiet as when I had taken my place beside him. Apparently, he had not stirred since.

I lit the remains of the bit of candle, dressed hurriedly, opened and closed the door softly, and went downstairs.

I found myself in the midst of a shivering crowd, called, as I had been, half an hour too soon, and execrating the night they had passed. It was plain that few of them had found companions as inoffensive as mine had been.

The up train came, and we scrambled on board, glad, at last, to be able to shake the dust of Skimptown from our feet.

“Fifteen minutes for breakfast!” shouted the conductor, as we stopped at a place that ought to have been called Mugby.

I got out, and was in [woeful] contemplation of a morsel of some inedible substance misnamed beefsteak, which had been set before me, when someone tapped me on the shoulder.

“Take it away!” I said, supposing I addressed the waiter.

“You must come with me,” said the man, in a tone of authority.

I gave him an indignant look. Such liberties were unbearable.

“You are my prisoner,” he added.

“Your prisoner!”

“Yes—my prisoner. I have been telegraphed to arrest you.”

“On what charge!” I asked, rising.

“Robbery and murder,” was the answer.

I can hardly tell whether I was more amazed or amused.

“Whether a joke or a mistake,” I said, “your conduct is all the same, stupid.”

“It will be all the same lucky for you,” the man replied, “if it turns out either joke or mistake. The man you slept with last night was found dead in his bed this morning. There are marks on his throat indicating that he was strangled, and his money and effects are missing.”

I protested my innocence, offered to be searched, recounted the occurrences of the night; but nobody took my part. The train went on, and I was detained and taken back on the next one going down.

Skimptown was in a ferment. As I was marched through the streets to the magistrate’s office, more than one excited citizen suggested that my case was one demanding the application of that rule of the higher law which prescribes hanging first and trying afterward.

Old Titefist deposed to my having been put to sleep with the “elderly gent,” and to his being found dead in the morning. He had further observed that the deceased had a watch and a considerable sum of money, both of which were missing. While a half-fledged doctor gave it as his opinion, from certain discolorations about the neck, that the man had been choked to death.

True, nothing belonging to the deceased was found upon me. I recounted my own version of the facts, calling attention to the circumstance that another person had shared the dead man’s apartment before me, and had left suspiciously. I begged for a brief delay till an experienced physician, then engaged, as I understood, in making a *postmortem* examination, should be ready to report. But my words made no impression. The magistrate deemed the case complete, and my full commitment was on the point of being made [out].

I was nearly frantic at the thought that another hour’s detention would prevent the keeping of my wedding engagement; and what would Margie think when she learned the cause!

“Stop a moment,” interrupted a stranger, entering in company with another whom he held by the arm.

“This man,” he continued, “is a noted thief, whom it has been my business, for some time past, to ‘shadow.’ I came down here with him last night; and when, after stopping an hour or two, he started by private conveyance to catch the train as it came up, I kept myself informed of his plans, and knew exactly at what point I should meet him again. When I saw this gentleman arrested this morning, and heard the circumstances, I immediately suspected who was the real culprit; and when my man here got aboard at the next station above, I arrested him at once, and found in his possession this watch and packet of money.”

Engraved on the watch was found the dead man’s name.

“I confess to the robbery,” whined the other prisoner; “but the man was dead when I committed it. He died in a fit just as we lay down together, and the opportunity tempted me to take his watch and money.”

And the thief’s story was true; for the doctor’s examination proved that the old gentleman had died of apoplexy, and that the supposed marks of violence had resulted from the natural settling of the blood after circulation had ceased.

I got off in time to keep my engagement, and had quite an adventure to relate besides.

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