

## *An Embarrassing Adventure*

by Judge Clark

Zephaniah Wheeler found the time hanging heavily. Catalpa Deale, his sweetheart and “true intended,” had gone to spend a fortnight at her uncle Pangburn’s with her city cousins. And though Zephaniah, as an especial guest, had, all the same, his share of Deacon Deale’s home-raised turkey, yet there was *one* sauce wanting, which, to his liking, would have lent the feast a higher flavor than the good deaconess’s choicest cranberry—the sauce of Catalpa’s presence.

“I think I’ll take a run down to the city to-morrow,” soliloquized Zephaniah on his way home, “and have a look at the markets.”

He would have blushed to own, even to himself, that it was Catalpa he longed to have a look at. To learn the state of the markets he had but to consult his daily paper, received almost as early as it was delivered in the city, but he didn’t seem to think of that.

Zephaniah took the early train. He wanted to get off before “the fellows” were round to ask questions as to whither he was going, and the object of his journey—and then look sly and wink as “fellows” always will when another fellow’s sweetheart’s in the case.

A three hours’ ride, of a sharp, cold morning, gives one a keen appetite; so, when Zephaniah landed at the Grand Central Dépôt it is not wonderful that his thoughts were about equally occupied with the charms of a hot rasher and eggs, with a coffee accompaniment, and those of the fair Catalpa. Nor should we conclude that the former had the preference because Zephaniah didn’t look in the directory for Uncle Pangburn’s address till he had finished his breakfast.

That over and a room secured, Zephaniah sauntered out. He was little versed in city ways, but had a general notion that it wouldn’t do to call at Catalpa’s uncle’s too early. The city cousins might think him countrified and tease Catalpa about her rustic lover. He would just stroll about a bit to pass away the time.

As he trudged along, gazing at the sights, he came upon a pensive-looking youth standing disconsolately at a corner.

“May I speak a word to you, sir?” inquired the latter, in a tremulous voice.

“Certainly,” answered Zephaniah, encouragingly—the traces of recent tears on the questioner’s cheeks, the symptoms of fresh ones about to burst, exciting his warmest sympathies.

The young man hid his face in a particolored handkerchief, and for some seconds gave way to his emotions.

Then, having wiped his eyes with the resolute action of one determined to conceal his anguish though it rent his heart, and blown his nose resignedly:

“I arrived here a stranger yesterday,” he said, “on my way to the bedside of a dying mother. My pocket was picked at the dépôt, and I am without the means to proceed or—or—” He was on the verge of breaking down again, but choking back a sob with a painfully audible gulp— “or of subsisting till a remittance comes,” he added dolefully.

It was Zephaniah’s turn to wipe his eyes.

“I have a watch here,” he said, looking cautiously about, as though shrinking from the humiliation of being seen in such extremity— “it was a birth-day gift from my shortly to be sainted mother. It cost a hundred and fifty dollars. I would sell it for a hundred, though to part with it would almost break my heart.”

Zephaniah examined the watch, which the stranger, after several more circumspective glances, had placed in his hand. The scrutiny was satisfactory. Zephaniah accounted himself no mean judge of a watch. He had owned several good ones in his time, and this seemed well worth the price set upon it.

“I feel deeply for you,” he said, “and would gladly aid you; but I don’t need a watch at present, having two already.”

The young man’s countenance sank.

“But I’ll tell you what I’ll do,” continued Zephaniah, hastening to relieve the poor fellow’s anxiety: “I’ll lend you the hundred dollars and take the watch, which you can have back at any time on sending me the money.”

“How can I ever thank you!” exclaimed the stranger, in a gush of gratitude.

He was on the point of again raising the variegated handkerchief, but stopped to watch the counting of the money.

“I must hurry to catch the next train!” he said, hastily pocketing the roll of crisp greenbacks. “I would gladly remain to give vent to my feelings, but the claims of a mother so soon to be sainted—”

He tore himself away, leaving the watch with his benefactor.

It was not till he was out of sight that it occurred to Zephaniah that the stranger had forgotten to ask his name and address—an omission due, doubtless, to the excitement of his feelings.

“But, then, he can advertise,” reflected Zephaniah, resuming his walk in the serene enjoyment of an approving conscience.

Zephaniah was an open-hearted and trustful, but not a fool. He had both heard and read of city tricks, and it occurred to him that he might as well make sure that he was not the victim of one.

He was passing a shop with “JEWELRY AND WATCHES BOUGHT AND SOLD” painted on the sign, and stepped in.

“What is that worth?” he asked of the man behind the counter, laying down his recent venture.

The shopman opened the case and screwed a glass into his eye.

“Six-ty dol-lars,” he answered hesitatingly, looking closely at the works.

“Or twice that if you had it for sale,” replied Zephaniah, well satisfied with his security, and reaching out to take the watch.

But the other continued his scrutiny. Then he called an assistant, and after a brief private conference the latter left the shop.

“How much do you ask for it?” questioned the jeweller, turning again to Zephaniah, and still retaining the watch.

“It’s not for sale,” returned the latter.

“Hump! —a family relic, perhaps,” hinted the other, with a smile slightly sneering.

“I don’t know that I’m required to explain how I came by it,” was the reply given tartly, for Zephaniah was nettled at what he considered an impertinence.

“Maybe you’ll explain to *this* gentleman,” said the shopman, as the assistant entered with a policeman.

“This watch,” he added, “bears the maker’s name and number of one reported to have been stolen from a lady yesterday, and a description of which has been furnished to all the dealers from the detective office.[”]

Zephaniah was ready enough to explain now, but his explanation was not accepted.

“You must come with me,” said the officer, taking his arm, and Zephaniah and the watch were taken to the nearest station-house.

A messenger was dispatched, who speedily returned with a middle-aged gentleman. The latter looked at the watch.

“Yes, it belongs to my niece,” he said; “it was taken from her pocket at a *matinée* yesterday. She thinks she could recognize the man who jostled her, and who was doubtless the thief.[”]

“Have your niece in court at two o’clock,” said the sergeant.

This gentleman promised, and Zephaniah was locked up with his reflections, which were not very cheerful company.

At two o'clock he was marched to court, and taken straight to the judge's private room, where the middle-aged gentleman and a lady were waiting.

When Zephaniah entered the lady gave a start of surprise.

"You identify him, then?" said the middle-aged gentleman.

"Zephaniah?" exclaimed the lady, heedless of the question, and hastening to clasp the prisoner's hand.

"And so, Catalpa," replied the latter, "it was *your* watch they accused me of taking!"

Catalpa Deale cast an annihilating look around.

"Why, uncle," she cried, "it's Zephaniah Wheeler! —the best—the honestest—dearest—"

She broke down under a violent attack of blushes.

At this moment another prisoner was led in.

"*There's* the man that pushed me in the crowd!" exclaimed Catalpa.

"And from whom I received the watch!" Zephaniah added.

"He has just been caught in another theft," said the officer who brought him.

The judge took down Zephaniah's and Catalpa's evidence, and the pickpocket, who gave his name as Epaminondas Potts, was immediately committed, Zephaniah receiving back his money.

Zephaniah spent a delightful evening with Catalpa and her city cousins, the latter behaving, like the well-bred young ladies they were, in such a way to set the visitor completely at his ease.

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