

ends, half squashed oranges, broken bottles with loathsome yellow exudations, toothbrushes, night-lights, and penny illustrated papers smeared with hair-oil and vaseline all over the deck, struggling for them under the impatient feet of the passengers, and restoring them to me with a grave sympathetic courtesy that even my aunt Catherine would, I think, have admitted was closely connected with the purest form of chivalry? I tried to get away, to lose myself in the crowd; but the block at the gangway stopped me, and I had to stand with burning face right under a jet of electric light, the abominable bandbox, with the cover-end reversed, across my arms, ready to receive Mrs. O'Toole's rescued property. At last, when the fair boy with the depraved countenance arrived with a roughly-patched and muddy high-low which evidently belonged to Mr. O'Toole, desperation made me cast properly to the winds. I seized his hand, and whispered excitedly—

"They don't belong to me. Will you tell the—the others, please—your friends—that—that the bandbox belongs to a woman, a perfect stranger, who asked me to help her with her parcels?"

"By Jove!" he exclaimed indignantly, taking it from me quickly. "What a beastly shame to give you such a thing to carry! Where is the woman? I'll give her a piece of my mind! Keep close behind me; I'll shoulder you a passage through the crowd."

"When we reached the platform, the first thing I saw was my chaperon blocking up the door of a second-class carriage and waving a handkerchief energetically to attract my attention.

"There she is! Will you hand her the bandbox, please?"

"Don't get in with her. Let me find you another carriage—not with me—no, of course," he amended, with a loud, shy laugh—"but with some lady or other."

"No, no," I answered hurriedly. "You are very kind; but I had better remain with her. She was nice to me on board; and I—I promised to travel through with her."

"He handed me in without further remonstrance, and then said, with blushing nervousness—

"Awfully sorry I—we are not booked for Euston too. Unfortunately we change at Chester for Liverpool; but, if there is anything I can do for you, I hope you—you—"

"Nothing, nothing indeed," I interrupted. "Thank you very much for your kindness; and"—leaning out of the window and sinking my voice—"please tell the others about that awful bandbox. Good-bye!"

"The whisper and the demeanor and appearance of my youthful escort shocked Mrs. O'Toole severely, and for nearly an hour, while we were thundering through the dreadful Welsh tunnels, I had to listen to a lecture on the danger of making promiscuous acquaintances in travelling, illustrated by personal experiences of a thrilling, indeed almost 'penny-dreadful' nature that would have delighted aunt Catherine.

"However, I did not resent the liberty, for I saw how simple and how very much in earnest the little woman was, and, besides, she was so very kind and attentive to me when she heard that I was recovering from a severe illness, and insisted on my throwing aside a light Maltese lace scarf I wore round my neck and muffling myself in a hideous red-and-yellow Shetland shawl of hers, which certainly made me as warm as a toast and put a stop to a slight neuralgic twinge that I was beginning to feel, for the night had grown very cold and damp.

"When we arrived at Chester I induced her, after some difficulty, to get out and have a cup of tea with me. She seemed very reluctant to leave her valuable property unprotected. However, after thrusting her baskets and bandboxes well underneath the seat, she seized the bird-cage, slipped it under her circular cloak, and we hurried across to the refreshment-room, where the crush was so great that we got rudely separated before we reached the table, and I did not see her again till I went back to the train.

"While I was trying to gulp down a cup of scalding tea, I could not help noticing that I was being watched in a very keen and impertinent manner by a tall dark-eyed man in a brown overcoat, whom I had not seen before, and who certainly was not on board the steamer. He stood within a yard of me drinking a glass of sherry, and, when I had finished and paid for my tea, I saw with indignant surprise that he put down his half finished glass and followed me to the door. Somewhat alarmed after Mrs. O'Toole's gruesome stories, I darted out quickly, and, turning a little to the left, slipped into a waiting-room until he had passed, and then hurried over to the train, which was within a minute of starting.

"To my intense astonishment, I found Mrs. O'Toole on the platform at the carriage door surrounded by her whole travelling paraphernalia, and almost in hysterics.

"Get in, get in," she gasped, "and I'll tell you all! I'm not goin' with you any farther, my dear; I'm off be the next train to Liverpool, and am sailin' for Philadelphia at six o'clock this blessed day! Oh, the contrariety of this vale of tears! Oh, the—"

"Sailing for America! What made you—"

"O'Toole's got a sudden appointment out there—hadn't time to write or wire anything; so he sent his clerk—that red-haired young man talkin' to the guard over there—to meet me here, with orders to join him at Liverpool at once, for he wouldn't leave England without me—not for all the appointments in the world. But, oh, what's to become of me, at all, at all?—not a stitch ready, my black silks only half turned, my poor sister waitin' for me at home, and—worst of all—how can I leave you, my sweetie, my pets, my ducky darlin's?"

(To be Continued.)

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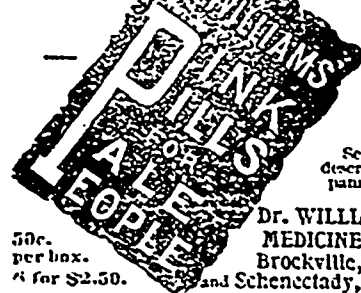
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