

Sleeping or Waking?

THE REMARKABLE EXPERIENCES OF JOHN COATES.

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III.

I aroused myself with a start, got up from my chair, paced once or twice across the room. I was wide awake now, and with my waking thoughts came a recurrence of the visions I had seen in my drowsy state.

What did it mean? I asked myself. The young girl, the railway train, the repulsive looking man, his efforts to entice the girl to leave the car, my interference, the clock at the depot. One by one the scenes returned to me, and the more I thought of them the conviction seemed to settle on my brain, until it became a certainty that these visions were sent as a warning to me.

But a warning of what? I had never seen the face of the young girl of my vision in my life. I had never seen the repulsive looking man. I expected nobody by the ten o'clock train. What then could it mean?

Then I glanced at the clock which was ticking merrily in my room. "A quarter to nine," I muttered; "no time to lose," and urged on by some unaccountable impulse, I threw off my comfortable dressing-gown, changed my easy slippers for walking boots, put on my outdoor garments, and issued forth from my cosy room into the night.

Still urged on by powers beyond my control, I hailed the first passing carriage, gave the carter hurried directions where to drive to, and was soon being whirled over the ground as swiftly as the horse could take me.

Along Sherbrooke street, down Mountain, along St. Catherine, down Guy, then along St. Joseph street, faster and faster flew the horse.

The excitement under which I laboured was entirely beyond my control. I was being urged on against my will—urged on by visions seen in a half-dreamy state.

Faster and faster went the horse, the keen night air seeming to infuse vigour into the noble beast. The driver, also, seemed to imbibe some of my excitement. He urged on his steed with shouts and encouraging words.

The houses were getting thinner and thinner, and the lights were growing dimmer and dimmer as we dashed past them at a rapid rate.

We were beyond the city limits on the Upper Lachine Road, passing farmhouse after farmhouse in our mad career.

But, hark! Is not that the sound of horse's hoofs in front of us?

I order the driver to stop for a moment, listen intently, and distinctly hear some vehicle rapidly driven, but very little in advance of us.

A thought strikes me. Can it be the carriage drawn by two horses I saw in my vision a short while ago?

The sounds I hear certainly proceed from more than one horse. I think rapidly and then direct the driver to urge on his horse, but not to overtake the vehicle in front.

Nearer and nearer we approach the vehicle in advance of us, and louder and louder grow the sounds of horses' hoofs on the hard ground.

I stand up in my carriage and peer into the darkness in front of me and faintly discern the outlines of a vehicle, and in the distance I faintly hear the voice of the driver urging on his flying steeds. Hurriedly whispering to my jehu to keep the carriage in front in sight, but not to approach any nearer to it, I resume my seat and quietly await developments.

Soon the noise of the carriage in advance ceases, and I order my own driver to draw up at the side of the road, when I alight.

In the distance I see two shadowy forms, evidently the inmate of the vehicle in advance of my own and the driver. The former seems to be giving directions to the latter, who returns to his carriage, while the other advances stealthily down the road.

Telling my man to await me till 10 o'clock, then, if I did not return, to go back to the city, I gave

him a handsome fare, and proceeded to follow in the footsteps of the man in advance, keeping well in the shadow of the hedge at the side of the road.

Soon I reached the railroad track and glanced up the road, fully expecting to see a figure in front of me. Nor was I disappointed. There, in the centre of the track, was a man in the act of striking a light. Soon it blazed up, and he applied it to a lantern he carried in his hand. He swung the lantern backwards and forwards once or twice. It was the "danger signal" I saw in my dream.

But, listen! Is not that distant rumble the sound of an approaching train?

From my hiding place at the side of the track I peer into the darkness ahead. I see a faint light gradually growing brighter and brighter—the headlight of a locomotive.

Then I look at the man standing in the middle of the track. He is frantically waving his lantern backwards and forwards, running up and down the track, shouting and gesticulating, and using every means in his power to stop the advancing train.

Hark! The signal has been seen; a shrill whistle breaks the stillness of the night. The train is slackening speed. It is almost at the crossing. The man with the lantern has disappeared. The train passes me slowly. It comes to a dead stop.

All is confusion. Train hands, with lanterns swinging, rush backwards and forwards, shouting loudly to know the cause of the sudden stoppage.

During the confusion I hurriedly approach the train and made my way to the Pullman car. I glance from one corner to the other through the windows and on a sight that does not surprise me in the least.

In her dainty little turban and sealskin sacque I see the fair maiden of my vision, and bending over her is the repulsive-visaged man, whose features were engraved in my memory. The maiden was in the act of rising, as if to follow the man from the car.

I rushed on to the platform just in time to see the man emerge from within. What impulse urged me on I know not, but, dealing the man a stunning blow, I hurled him from the car with such force as to land him in the hedge by the side of the track.

Then, still guided by impulse, I gently pushed back the maiden, who was following the man I had hurled from the car, but who had not seen the action, closed the door of the compartment, and jumped off the platform, just as the car once more started in motion.

I immediately sought for the man I had so forcibly ejected, but he was nowhere to be seen. Walking leisurely down the road, I once more heard the sound of horses' hoofs on the hard ground, together with the noise of a swiftly driven vehicle. I concluded that the man I had assailed had not been much hurt, and that he was driving back to town, and this surmise was verified when I reached my own carriage, the driver of which told me that he had put out the light in his carriage to prevent it being discovered by the other.

Telling my man to drive with all speed to Bonaventure Depot, I leaned back in my carriage and pondered deeply on the visions I had seen and their remarkable consequences.

Who the maiden was, or who the man, I could not tell. I had never seen either of them before to my knowledge, nor could I by any means account for my having been used as an instrument in the matter.

I had acted from the moment I had left my own house on impulse—an irresistible impulse which I could not withstand.

These and other like thoughts flashed through my brain as I was rapidly driven, first through the quiet country road, then into the more noisy city, till at last my driver drew up before the Bonaventure Depot.

Rapidly alighting, I entered the building and made enquiries as to what time the western train had arrived.

"The train was ten minutes late," replied the official. "A stoppage for some reason or other at the Blue Bonnets' crossing. It did not arrive till ten minutes past ten."

This was all I wanted to know. My last vision was verified.

Returning to my carriage, I bade the driver take me to my residence, which he did with all speed, but it was many hours before sleep would come to my eyelids that night.

IV.

On awakening the next morning, in the midst of a troubled dream, in which were mixed up beautiful maidens, villainous-looking men, flying carriages, and still more swiftly flying trains, almost my first thought was that I was to dine that day with Mr. Furze, my employer.

The hour set for the dinner was one o'clock, and I was requested to be punctual. Therefore, at a few minutes before the appointed time, I presented myself at the residence of Mr. Furze, on Sherbrooke street.

My employer received me very kindly, and ushered me into the drawing-room, where I received a warm welcome from his genial lady. Another lady rose up on my entry, and Mr. Furze, turning to me, said:

"Mr. Coates, permit me to introduce my niece, Miss Alice Furze. Alice, my dear, this is my junior partner, Mr. Coates."

I turned at his words and gave my first look at the lady standing beside her uncle, and I was thunderstruck.

I could not take my eyes off the face of the young lady (for she was young), although I could see that my gaze somewhat disconcerted her.

I stammered something, what I cannot tell, and tried to bow, but it was a sorry attempt, indeed, for my eyes wandered immediately back to the blushing countenance of the maiden.

And well, indeed, might I look, for the maiden standing before me was the same—I could swear to it—that I had seen in my vision the night before—the same maiden of whom I had caught a glimpse in the Pullman car—the same maiden whom I had gently pushed back and closed the door upon after I had hurled the man who would take her away from the platform of the car.

I tried as best I could to shake off my embarrassment. I tried to give answers to the commonplace remarks of my host, but it seemed utterly impossible for me to do so.

Mr. Furze at last took pity on me. He evidently thought that his niece's loveliness was the cause of my—to him—apparent absence of mind, and suggested that we adjourn to the library until dinner should be announced. I gladly accepted the invitation, and when we had reached this *sanctum sanctorum* of the old merchant, he said:

"Well, my boy, what do you think of my niece?"

"Why, sir," I replied, "I never before saw so beautiful a woman."

"So I should think from the way you stared at her," chuckled Mr. Furze. "It is easy to see that you are not used to ladies' society. You have stuck too closely to your desk these last few years. But I hope we shall soon be able to polish you up a little."

I bowed politely, the more to hide my confusion at the old gentleman's mistaken idea, and then said:

"I had no idea, Mr. Furze, that you had a niece. I have never met her in my previous visits to your house."

"No," he returned; "Alice has been stopping with some friends in Toronto since she finished her education, and only arrived from the west last night."

I gave another start at this, but my employer did not notice it, as he was glancing at a book on the table at the time.

But this was another corroboration—if corroboration were necessary—that the maiden of my vision and Miss Alice Furze were the same.

Before, however, I had time to put further questions, the dinner bell rang, and we returned to the drawing-room, when Mr. Furze requested me to conduct Miss Alice to the dining-room.

Following my host and hostess, I found that dinner had been laid but for four. Mr. Furze took the head of the table, Mrs. Furze the foot, while Miss Alice and myself sat facing one another.

My employer was in merry mood, and his little jests and bits of repartee were ably seconded by his worthy wife and Miss Alice; but as far as I was concerned, I could not shake off the feeling of pre-