

The Man on the Train

Grandma Sheldon Little Dreamed That on Her First Railway Journey She Was "Entertaining an Angel Unawares"

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Illustrated by Fergus Kyle.

WHEN the telegram came from William George, Grandma Sheldon was all alone with Cyrus and Louise. And Cyrus and Louise, aged, respectively, twelve and eleven, were not very much good, grandma thought, when it came to advising what was to be done. Grandma was "all in a flutter, dear, oh dear," as she said.

The telegram said that Delia, William George's wife, was seriously ill down at Green Village, and William George wanted Samuel to bring grandma down immediately. Delia had always thought there was nobody like grandma when it came to nursing sick folks.

But Samuel and his wife were both away—had been away for two days and intended to be away for five more. They had driven to Sinclair, twenty miles away, to visit with Mrs. Samuel's folks for a week.

"Dear, oh dear, what shall I do?" said grandma. "Go right to Green Village on the evening train," said Cyrus, briskly.

"Dear, oh dear, and leave you two alone!" cried grandma.

"Louise and I will do very well until to-morrow," said Cyrus, sturdily. "We will send word to Sinclair by to-day's mail and father and mother will be home by to-morrow night."

"But I never was on the cars in my life," protested grandma, nervously. "I'm—I'm so frightened to start alone. And you never know what kind of people you may meet on the train."

"You'll be all right, grandma. I'll drive you to the station, get you your ticket, and put you on the train. Then you'll have nothing to do until the train gets to Green Village. I'll send a telegram to Uncle William George to meet you."

"I shall fall and break my neck getting off the train," said grandma, pessimistically. But she was wondering at the same time whether she had better take the black valise or the yellow, and whether William George would be likely to have plenty of flaxseed in the house.

It was six miles to the station and Cyrus drove grandma over in time to catch a train that reached Green Village at nine o'clock.

"Dear, oh dear," said grandma, "what if William George's folks ain't there to meet me? It's all very well, Cyrus, to say that they will be there, but you don't know. And it's all very well to say not to be nervous because everything will be all right. If you were seventy-five years old and had never set foot on the cars in your life you'd be nervous, too; and you can't be sure that everything will be all right. You never know what sort of people you'll meet on the train. I may get on the wrong train or lose my ticket or get carried past Green Village or get my pocket picked. Well, no, I won't do that, for not one cent will I carry with me. You shall take back home all the money you don't need to get my ticket. Then I shall be easier in my mind. Dear, oh dear, if it wasn't that Delia is so seriously ill I wouldn't go one step."

"Oh, you'll be all right, grandma," assured Cyrus. He got grandma's ticket for her and grandma tied it up in the corner of her handkerchief. Then the train came in and grandma, clinging closely to Cyrus, was put on it. Cyrus found a comfortable seat for her and shook hands cheerily.

"Good-bye, grandma. Don't be frightened. Here's the Weekly Argus. I got it at the store. You may like to look over it."

Then Cyrus was gone and in a minute the station house and platform began to glide away.

"Dear, oh dear, what has happened to it?" thought grandma, in dismay. The next moment she exclaimed aloud, "Why, it's us that's moving, not it!"

SOME of the passengers smiled pleasantly at grandma. She was the variety of old lady at which people do smile pleasantly; a grandma with round, pink cheeks, soft, brown eyes, and lovely snow-white curls is a nice person to look at wherever she is found.

After a while grandma, to her amazement, discovered that she liked riding on the cars. It was not at all the disagreeable experience she had expected it to be. Why, she was just as comfortable as if she were in her own rocking chair at home! And there was such a lot of people to look at and hats. After all, the people you meet on a train, thought grandma, are surprisingly like the people you meet off it. If it had not been for wondering how she would get off at Green Village, grandma would have enjoyed herself thoroughly.

Four or five stations farther on the train halted at a lonely-looking place, consisting of the station house and a barn, surrounded by scrub woods and only one vacant seat in the crowded car, sat right down beside Grandma Sheldon.

Grandma Sheldon held her breath while she looked him over. Was he a pickpocket? He didn't appear

like one, but you can never be sure of the people you meet on the train. Grandma remembered with a sigh of thankfulness that she had no money.

Besides, he seemed really very respectable and harmless. He was quietly dressed in a suit of dark-blue serge with a black overcoat. He wore his hat well down on his forehead and was clean shaven. His hair was very black, but his eyes were blue—"nice eyes"—grandma thought. She always felt great confidence in a man who had bright, open, blue eyes. Grandpa Sheldon, who had died so long ago, four years after their marriage, had had bright blue eyes.

"To be sure, he had fair hair," reflected grandma. "It's real odd to see such black hair with such light blue eyes. Well, he's real nice-looking, and I don't believe there's a mite of harm in him."

The early autumn night had now fallen and grandma could not amuse herself by watching the scenery. She bethought herself of the paper Cyrus had given her and took it out of her basket. It was an old weekly a fortnight back. On the first page was a long account of a murder case with scare heads, and into this grandma plunged eagerly. Sweet old Grandma Sheldon, who would not have harmed a fly and hated to see even a mousetrap set, simply revelled in the newspaper accounts of murders. And the more shocking and cold-blooded they were the more eagerly did grandma read of them.

THIS murder story was particularly good from grandma's point of view; it was full of "thrills."

A man had been shot down, apparently in cold blood, and his supposed murderer was still at large and had eluded all the efforts of justice to capture him. His name was Mark Hartwell and he was described as a tall, fair man, with full auburn beard and curly, light hair.

"What a shocking thing!" said grandma, aloud.

Her companion looked at her with a kindly, amused smile.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Why, this murder at Charlotteville," answered grandma, forgetting, in her excitement, that it was not safe to talk to people you meet on the train. "It just makes my blood run cold to read about it. And to think that the man who did it is still around the country somewhere—plotting other murders, I haven't a doubt. What is the good of the police?"

"They're dull fellows," agreed the dark man.

"But I don't envy that man his conscience," said grandma, solemnly—and somewhat inconsistently, in view of her statement about the other murders that were being plotted. "What must a man feel like who

has the blood of a fellow creature on his hands? Depend upon it, his punishment has begun already, caught or not."

"That is true," said the dark man, quietly.

"Such a good-looking man, too," said grandma, looking wistfully at the murderer's picture. "It doesn't seem possible that he can have killed anybody. But the paper says there isn't a doubt."

"He is probably guilty," said the dark man, "but nothing is known of his provocation. The affair may not have been so cold-blooded as the accounts state. Those newspaper fellows never err on the side of undercolouring."

"Anybody here to meet Mrs. Sheldon?" he asked of the station master.

"I really think," said grandma, slowly, "that I would like to see a murderer—just one. Whenever I say anything like that Adelaide—Adelaide is Samuel's wife—looks at me as if she thought there was something wrong about me. And perhaps there is; but I do, all the same. When I was a little girl there was a man in our settlement who was suspected of poisoning his wife. She died very suddenly. I used to look at him with such interest. But it wasn't satisfactory, because you could never be sure whether he was really guilty or not. I never could believe that he was, because he was such a nice man in some ways and so good and kind to children. I don't believe a man who was bad enough to poison his wife could have any good in him."

"Perhaps not," agreed the dark man. He had absent-mindedly folded up grandma's old copy of the Argus and put it in his pocket. Grandma did not like to ask him for it, although she would have liked to see if there were any more murder stories in it. Besides, just at that moment the conductor came around for tickets.

GRANDMA looked in the basket for her handkerchief. It was not there. She looked on the floor and on the seat and under the seat. It was not there. She stood up and shook herself—still no handkerchief.

"Dear, oh dear," exclaimed grandma, wildly, "I've lost my ticket—I always knew I would—I told Cyrus I would! Oh, where can it be?"

The conductor scowled unsympathetically. The dark man got up and helped grandma search, but no ticket was to be found.

"You'll have to pay the money, then, and something extra," said the conductor, gruffly.

"I can't—I haven't a cent of money," wailed grandma. "I gave it all to Cyrus, because I was afraid my pocket would be picked. Oh, what shall I do?"

"Don't worry. I'll make it all right," said the dark man. He took out his pocket-book and handed the conductor a bill. That functionary grumblingly made the change and marched onward, while grandma, pale with excitement and relief, sank back into her seat.

"I can't tell you how much I am obliged to you, sir," she said, tremulously. "I don't know what I should have done. Would he have put me off right here in the snow?"

"I hardly think he would have gone to such lengths," said the dark man, with a smile. "But he's a cranky, disobliging fellow enough—I know him of old. And you must not feel overly grateful to me. I am glad of the opportunity to help you. I had an old grandmother myself, once," he added, with a sigh.

"You must give me your name and address, of course," said grandma, "and my son—Samuel Sheldon, of Midverne, will see that the money is returned to you. Well, this is a lesson to me! I'll never trust myself on a train again, and all I wish is that I was safely off this one. This fuss has worked my nerves all up again."

"Don't worry, grandma. I'll see you safely off the train when we get to Green Village."

"Will you, though? Will you, now?" said grandma, eagerly. "I'll be real easy in my mind, then," she

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