

Sleeping or Waking?

THE REMARKABLE EXPERIENCES OF JOHN COATES

BY W. S. HUMPHREYS.

I bounded from my seat and stared at him with astonishment. I was thunderstruck when I first saw Miss Alice in this room a few hours ago, but I was perfectly dumbfounded as I gazed at this man. For he was the man of my vision—the man who had driven out to the railway crossing—the man who waved the lantern that stopped the train—the man who endeavoured to entice Miss Alice from the car—the man whom I had hurled into the bushes.

I gazed at him with wide open eyes, until Mr. Furze said:

"What is the matter, Mr. Coates? You look as though you saw a ghost." While the man called Austell said, in harsh tones, "What the devil are you staring at?"

I sunk down in my chair and tried to collect my senses. Words would not come for some minutes, but after another question from Mr. Furze, I said:

"If you will permit me, sir, I would like to make an explanation of my conduct since I entered your house this afternoon, which must certainly have seemed very strange to you."

"Somewhat strange, certainly, Mr. Coates. But I beg you will defer your explanation till after I have got rid of this somewhat troublesome visitor," indicating Austell.

"I trust you will permit Mr. Austell to remain," I answered. "He may be able to elucidate a mystery."

"Certainly, if you particularly wish it," responded Mr. Furze; "but be kind enough to make your explanation as brief as possible, as I am not anxious to have this man in my house a moment longer than I can help."

I promised to comply with the request of my host, and then, after a few moments spent in collecting my somewhat shattered senses, I told my story.

I commenced from the moment I left Mr. Furze the previous evening, and then recounted all the incidents of my strange vision—the sights that passed before me as I sat in a half-drowsy state before my fire—I told how, led by an irresistible impulse, I had taken a carriage and driven to the railway crossing, and, when there, how all that I had seen in my vision had been verified.

While I was telling my story the faces of my listeners were a study. On those of Mr. and Mrs. Furze were stamped incredulity and surprise—incredulity at the strangeness of my narrative, and surprise at the varied emotions depicted on the countenances of Miss Alice and Austell. The two latter followed me through, listening to my every word with breathless attention, and would have interrupted me in the course of my narrative more than once had I not requested them to keep silence till I had finished. But when I had got to the scene on the platform of the car, and said:

"You, Miss Alice, are the young lady that I prevented being carried off by this gentleman, Mr. Austell," the latter jumped to his feet, and, with an oath, advanced towards me with the words:

"And so it is you, sir, whom I have to thank for the frustration of my scheme? It is you whom I have to thank for taking me unawares and hurling me from the car? Rest assured you shall pay for it dearly, you—"

What he was going to say was interrupted by Mr. Furze, who, in a loud voice, exclaimed:

"Hold! What means all this? Speak, Joseph Austell, is this all true? Has Mr. Coates been telling a true story or a fable? Tell me, Joseph Austell. Tell me, Alice."

Then it was that Austell saw the grave mistake he had made in so rashly confirming my suspicions. But Miss Alice was the first to answer her uncle's question.

"Uncle," she said, "Joseph certainly did get on the car when it stopped at the crossing. He entered the Pullman, and, advancing to me, said that you had driven out with him to meet me at the crossing, and requesting me to accompany him to your carriage, where, Joseph said, you awaited me,

proposing that we should drive back to the city together. I followed him to the platform of the car, and was just about stepping out when I was gently pushed back and the door closed in my face. A few moments afterwards the train started again and did not stop till we arrived at Bonaventure Depot at ten minutes past ten. I saw nothing more of Joseph, and thought it somewhat strange. I intended mentioning the circumstance to you, uncle, but you know that the moment I uttered Joseph's name you bade me, if I wanted to retain your affection, never to mention my cousin's name in your presence."

While Miss Alice was speaking the old merchant had kept his eyes fixed sternly on the ever-changing and villanous countenance of Austell, and when the young lady had finished he said, in harsh tones:

"Now, sir, what have you got to say? What dark deed were you engaged in last night? No lying will avail you now. Tell me at once, sir, what your scheme was and, if you value at all your own interest, try if you can speak the truth for once in your life."

Austell commenced in a tone of bravado to make light of the affair, but was immediately checked by Mr. Furze, who said, sternly:

"The truth, sir, otherwise I will order my servant to go for a policeman and have you arrested on a charge of forgery. Ah! sir, you turn pale at this; but I tell you that were you not my sister's child you should long ago have been behind prison bars."

The cornered villain, after bestowing upon me a look of the deepest hate, finding that his former brave air availed him not, replied in cringing tones:

"Don't be so hard on me, uncle, and I will tell you all."

"Stop, sir! Never call me uncle again. I disown you entirely, and after you leave this house to-day, I trust I shall never look upon your face again. Now speak, quickly."

"So be it," he returned; "I will not keep you longer in suspense. You know you have forbidden me to see my cousin; but what do I care for your commands when I consider my interest at stake. I knew, for you had told me yourself, that Alice was to be your heiress, and I thought it unjust that she should have all your money, while I was to be cast off with a shilling. I, therefore, made several visits to Toronto for the purpose of seeing her, and I think that I worked so much on her feelings that she at last looked on me at least with pity. My scheme was to marry her privately before she returned to Montreal, but in this I was baffled. I thought she would stay in Toronto till Christmas, and did not learn that you had requested her to come to this city at once till the night before last. Then I concocted the plan to abduct her, and would have carried it out successfully had not this meddling fool—whom may the foul fiend take—stepped in and spoiled my scheme. I thought that, once in my power, I could prevail upon Alice to consent to a private marriage, and then I could have snapped my fingers at you. Now you know all, and I suppose I can say good evening."

"One moment," said the old merchant, in stern tones. "I have but few words to say, but I warn you to listen to them attentively. Joseph Austell, you are a criminal in the eyes of the law. You are a forger, and now you have confessed yourself guilty of attempted abduction. Do you know the penalty for these crimes? If not, I advise you to find out as soon as possible. That you have the blood of my dead sister in your veins is the only thing that compels me to show leniency toward you. Now I warn you. Get out of this city to-night—get to the States—for if you are seen here, or in any part of Canada, within the next forty-eight hours, you will be arrested and made to answer for your crimes. I will give you twenty-eight hours to get away, after which time I will lay my complaint before the police authorities, with instructions to arrest you should you be found in Canada. Now, go, baffled villain that you are, and let me never see you again."

Casting a look of the deepest hate on all the personages present, Joseph Austell left the room not one of the four inmates of which ever saw him again.

V.

A deep and long-continued silence succeeded the departure of Joseph Austell. Each occupant of the room was occupied with his or her thoughts, and all wondered at the strange occurrences of the past night, in which I had played so prominent a part. At last Mr. Furze spoke:

"Mr. Coates," he said, "my treatment of my nephew must seem somewhat strange to you; but so many remarkable things have happened during the past twenty-four hours, that I am sure you will pardon me if I am somewhat bewildered at the course of events. But you have given your explanations, and a tale it was—fraught with wonderful events; therefore, I feel that I owe you something on my own part in return."

"My dear sir," I replied, "I assure you I do not want you to say anything that may be painful to you. It is no business of mine how you treat your nephew, and I feel assured that you would not treat him harshly without just cause."

"Thanks, my friend," said the old merchant; "but still I feel that it is my duty to tell you something of my nephew, more especially as you are about to become a partner in our concern, and some things may be brought before your notice in your new capacity that it were well you should have an inkling of in advance. Besides, I am sure Alice here is willing that you should know, after the great service you rendered her last night."

The young lady appealed to had been silent since the departure of Austell. She was stunned, bewildered, at the audacity of the plot laid bare by her villainous cousin, and found it difficult to command her voice. At last she said:

"Oh! uncle, help me to thank Mr. Coates for saving me? Where should I have been now but for him?"

Then, turning to me, she held out her hand and continued:

"I thank you with all my heart, and shall pray for your peace and happiness as long as I have breath in my body."

I took the little hand pressed it warmly, while I muttered as lightly as I could:

"Miss Alice, you make far too much of the slight service I was enabled to render you. I acted from impulse—I was led, as it were, by invisible hands."

"The hands of Providence," ejaculated Mrs. Furze, who had not yet spoken, and she also arose and gave me her hand.

"Yes," I continued, "Providence must have led me to prevent the consummation of a vile plot, and I thank heaven that I followed the promptings of my heart, and allowed myself to be led, thus arriving just in time to avert a terrible misfortune to Miss Furze."

"Don't you think that I ought to have a share in this general handshaking," cried Mr. Furze, jumping up and holding out his hand, which I grasped, and received a hearty shake. "If any body ought to thank Mr. Coates I am sure it should be I, and I assure you," he said to me, "that I shall remember your action as long as I live. It has but added another page to the record of esteem in which I hold you."

I assured them all once more that they were making far too much of the service I was enabled to render Miss Furze; but they drowned my voice in protestations to the contrary.

When a lull in the conversation at last occurred, Mr. Furze said:

"And now, if you will allow me, I will get over an unpleasant duty as quickly as possible. Joseph Austell, as I think I mentioned, is the son of my dead sister. The latter made a runaway marriage with one of my father's clerks, who was in no way suited to her. But of this I will not speak. My father, before his death, forgave his daughter, who had been widowed in the meantime, and settled \$4,000 a year on her for life, and left \$20,000 for her son, Joseph, which he was to receive on his twenty-first birthday. The boy was given a good education, or, at least, he was sent to the best schools, and subsequently to college; but I am afraid he paid very little attention to his studies, being always mixed up with all the wild pranks of the students; in fact he was looked upon as the