

A Parlor Car Puzzle.

By HOWARD FIELDING.

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It is important to know how the people were placed when this thing happened. The pretty girl sat in seat No. 7 and was thus about midway of the car, on the left side looking forward. Directly in front of her, in seat No. 5, was a lean, tall, lithe man of forty years, with scanty dark hair and gray eyes. He was dressed in a style of quiet elegance. A panama hat hung from the gilded peg over his head, and a neat traveling bag was on the floor beside him. He seemed to be dozing.

I occupied seat No. 9, and behind me were a woman and her son, an unpleasant child, of a very dull countenance, but as restless as a scared jackal in a cage. Opposite me, in No. 10, was Mortimer Belden, whom I have known some years. He is a rich man and looks the part. Before and behind him, in seats 8 and 12, were young men of much the same type as himself. They were strangers to each other and to us.

The pretty girl had boarded the train at Albany, had immediately opened a book and, except for an occasional glance out of the window, had not for a single moment ceased to read. We were some miles beyond Utica when she closed her book and laid it upon the window ledge. A few minutes later I heard her utter a faint cry. She bent forward and studiously regarded the floor. Then she stepped out into the aisle for a more comprehensive view, and I thought that she had spied the object of her search, for she knelt quickly beside her chair. But when she raised her head her glance encountered mine, and I perceived instantly that she had not succeeded. A pretty bewilderment was in her big brown eyes, and as she turned them again to the floor I saw her wink rapidly, as a child does when its vision seems at fault.

At this juncture the young animal from seat No. 13 arrived upon the scene with a startling suddenness and yet not running.

"Lost anything?" said he in that flat and whining voice, as of the educated



surely not to be lost in this ridiculous manner. There was not a cranny in which it could be hidden; there were no dark shadows, for the hour was 4 of a summer afternoon and the day very bright. Six of us—not to count the bad boy, who was viewed with suspicion by all and had been kept upon the outskirts—had searched twenty square feet of floor space in vain. The situation began to be painful, for if the ring was not on the floor it was in somebody's pocket.

Already I had observed my friend Belden to be eyeing the three strangers critically, and now he edged away toward the forward end of the car with the distinguished looking gentleman who had occupied seat No. 5. Obviously they were about to hold a consultation, and at the sight an idea came into my head.

I turned toward the pretty girl and was much gratified to perceive that my



"SHE BEGGED ME TO BE EXPLICIT."

Desire for private conversation was shared by her. She must have been perfectly sure that the ring was not on the floor, for she abandoned the spot without hesitation and followed me to the rear of the coach, where she graciously consented to accept my sympathy and my card. I learned that she was Miss Myrtle Leigh and that she lived in Syracuse.

"Do you suppose that dreadful little boy could have found my ring?" she asked. "And yet how could he? I don't understand it at all."

"My suspicions incline in another direction," said I, "and for rather an odd reason."

She begged me to be explicit. "There happens to be on this train," said I, "a detective from New York, really quite a celebrated fellow in his way. His name is Anderson. I know him quite well. He passed through our car just after we left Albany, but I did not make any sign of recognition because he didn't. That's the etiquette with detectives. They share with ladies the precedence in the matter of bowing to their acquaintances. He saw and recognized me, of course, and he also saw and recognized, with quite a different feeling, the man who sat in front of you, in seat No. 5."

"Oh, my!" she exclaimed in a hushed voice. "You don't mean he knew him for a—a criminal?"

"The idea flashed through my mind," I replied. "You see, I've been about with Anderson and others of his profession quite a bit for the interest of it, and I know their ways. Of course this is rather a wild accusation, for, upon my word, I don't see how the fellow could have got the ring without your seeing him, and yet I think I'd better hunt up Anderson and try to get a word with him. He's still on the train, for I've seen him since we left Utica. He went forward just after we pulled out."

Miss Leigh was naturally indisposed to accuse any one or even to begin a police investigation under such circumstances, but she agreed with me that Mr. Anderson's advice would certainly be helpful.

The man whose reputation I had so recklessly assailed was not in view when Miss Leigh and I returned to our seats. Belden told me that he had gone forward, and he added, with a laugh, "He thinks you got it."

"I? Blast him!" "What do you think?" "I think he got it."

"Well, you're even on that," said Belden, and the idea seemed to amuse him.

"Now, look here," said I; "I have my reasons, but there's no time to tell you what they are. I may give you a surprise presently. You keep your eye on that panama hat and the grip over there. This train stops at Glendon, and we're within two minutes of the place now. If that fellow tries to get off, stop him."

"What?" gasped Belden.

"Well, if you don't dare do that, delay him. Keep your eye on him. I'll be back inside the two minutes."

I hurried forward through the train, which was already slowing down for the Glendon station, but I did not find Anderson. Annoyed by this failure, I returned more slowly, keeping a sharper eye upon my fellow passengers, but the detective had disappeared. Obviously he must have got to the rear of the train without my seeing him, perhaps while I and the others were pawing around on the floor and bumping one another's head.

The train had come to a stop by the time that I reached our car, but the bag and the panama hat were still in view, and Belden was on guard. Miss Leigh, however, was not visible. Belden said she had gone "aft." I also went "aft." I went to the end of the train, but I did not find Anderson nor Miss Leigh nor the man from seat No. 5. It seemed to be a day when not only diamond rings, but people, were able to lose themselves with unexampled facility.

When I re-entered our car, Belden had vanished. I glanced hastily toward seat No. 5. The hat and grip were still there.

"Your friend's gone to find the conductor," said the man in seat No. 12. "At least I think so. He asked me if I remembered which way the conductor went. He seemed rather excited."

At this moment the man in seat No. 8 rose hastily. In fact, he came up as if propelled by a spring. He turned toward us, leaning with one hand upon the chair back. The other hand was at his breast. His mouth hung open; his eyes stared.

"My pocketbook!" he gasped. Instinctively I thrust my hand inside my waistcoat, where in a pocket which I had always thought to be beyond the reach of thieves I had been accustomed to carry the bulk of my immediate funds. The pocket was empty.

The man in No. 12 looked from one to the other of us, and he grinned. His hands were in his trousers pockets.

"My money's all right," said he. "I didn't have much, but"—he paused and then suddenly clapped his hand to his tie. "By Jingo! My pin's gone!" "He touched me for better than a thousand!" said No. 8, and I saw him moisten his dry lips with his tongue.

"I suppose there's no doubt"—I began, and finished the sentence by pointing to seat No. 5.

"Nonsense," said No. 12. "It was the girl. She made the bluff of dropping the ring, knowing what we'd do, and while we were all butting our heads against the furniture and she was reaching over us, pointing out likely places—Oh, oh, oh! What a set of easy marks!"

"But where's the man?" I demanded. "There are his things," retorted No. 12. "He's still on the train. But where's the girl?"

"Miss Leigh was kind enough to permit a sort of introduction between herself and me," said I. "I may perhaps claim the right to defend her, since there is no one else here who knows her at all, and I would like it to be understood that nothing further must be said which touches her good name and that what has been said must be withdrawn."

No. 12 looked me in the eye. He was firm in his opinion and a man of nerve. I could see him hardening his heart for a reply that would create a very strained situation. Then suddenly his expression changed to one of astonishment. He was looking over my shoulder. I turned and saw Miss Leigh.

Behind her was Belden, and behind him was Anderson. The conductor brought up the rear.

Miss Leigh came straight to me. "It was that man!" she cried. "You were right. I've got my ring again."

And she held up her hand to show it. "After you left me I went to the rear platform of the car," she continued. "The train was stopping, and I had your words in mind. I thought that man might get off, and he did. And when I saw that he had another hat on—a soft one that must have been folded in his pocket—then I knew for sure. And I ran after him, and just as I caught him Mr. Anderson caught him too. He's in the baggage car now, and Mr. Anderson has all your things."

"Yes," said Anderson, with his peculiar drawl, "when I saw Tony Jack Wallace quitting us like that and pulling out his folder had I knew something was queer, so I just trailed along. Nobody quicker than Tony Jack to take advantage of a little accident like the lady dropping the diamond. I'll bet he had it before it touched the floor. See him do it? Why, that man could take your shoes off your feet and you wouldn't know it. Working the trains is his specialty, and he al-



"MY DEAR LITTLE RING," SAID SHE.

ways has a bit of fake baggage to make you think he's still aboard. I hadn't seen him in two or three years; didn't know he'd come back to this part of the country. But now he's

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back he'll have to stay. I've got him dead to rights this time. And now, gentlemen, if you'll name your losses I'll make good. I've got all the plunder!"
Miss Leigh resumed her place in seat No. 7 and I mine in No. 9, but now the two seats faced each other.
"My dear little ring!" said she. "I love it very much. It was my mother's."
She saw the look in my eye, and she laughed.
"I have to wear it on that finger," she said. "It won't fit any other."

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