

MONDAY, AUGUST 27, 1888.

A FORTUNE'S STORY

On a fine summer day in the year 1871 I was proceeding by the Southwestern railway to visit a friend and former patient a resident of Portsmouth. It is not often that a medical man gets a holiday and but for the kindness of a fellow practitioner in taking my practice for a fort night I should not have had an opportunity of enjoying the sea breeze.

The train on which I started was an early one and having purchased my ticket I took my place in the second class carriage and lit my cigar for it was a smoking carriage. On entering it I was surprised—and I think naturally so—to find the farther end of it occupied by a lady.

"Oh!" said I inwardly "some fast American dame who who desired to indulge in a cigarette."

On observation however it appeared to me that the features of my fellow traveler did not bear upon them that impression of coquetry which marks American nationality. She had soft brown eyes a full round face and a profusion of chestnut hair. She was dressed in a plain traveling suit bound with white braid and wore a straw hat.

May I, however, I soliloquized "they are terrible smokers".

But again it occurred to me that possibly the young lady might be neither American nor German but had got into the carriage without noticing that it was reserved for the use of smokers. Under this impression I bowed slightly to her saying:

"I fear my cigar may annoy you. Perhaps you are not aware that this is a smoking compartment?"

"Oh yes," she answered with a slight German accent "you can yes yes yes!"

There was something peculiar in her slow deliberate utterance and the half times repeated monosyllable a dream-like look too in the speaker's eyes as if the mind was preoccupied. However the train was now in motion and I had nothing for it but to excuse myself in my corner, look out of the window and take a bird's eye view of the surrounding houses.

For a short time this was well enough but I began at last to weary of the monotony of such an amusement. We Englishmen, as a rule, are so reserved as unaccustomed that we shrink into ourselves and every fresh addition to the occupant of a railway carriage or omnibus is received with blank looks and a sort of indifference that it has no right to exist. Now I am free to confess that whatever my feelings want of sociability is not one of them and I determined to try to engage my companion in a little conversation. There could be no impropriety in a man of my age (I was 38) endeavoring to beguile the leisure of a long journey by conversing with a fellow traveler—a school girl—and certainly not out of her town. It was therefore with an almost paternal feeling that I addressed her.

"There are not many passengers by this train," I remarked.

"Two thousand and three," was the answer that not a little startled my equanimity.

I looked at the speaker expecting to find a mischievous smile dancing in her eyes or lurking in the corners of her mouth. Nothing of the sort. She was perfectly serious even stern and her eyes had still the same dreamy far away look in them.

Very absent minded, or else in love I thought to myself. However I tried again.

I think we shall have a fine day for our journey, I ventured to remark.

She turned upon me with that despairing yet restless look that we see in a trapped rat.

"How you talk, talk talk!" she cried indignantly.

"Are you mad?" she screamed in a tone of such intensest shrillness and with such an awful hungry look in her eye that the truth dashed upon me like an inspiration.

She was mad!

Medical man as I am, a feeling of horror overcame me when I reflected that I was shut up alone in the carriage of a train traveling at express speed with a lunatic. True I was a strong man she only a girl. But it is inconceivable what extreme strength is possessed by many of the insane & I have known a woman thus afflicted require two and even three powerful men to restrain her during one of her paroxysms.

However I endeavored to keep as cool as possible as I looked the young girl steadily in the face. She looked at me for a moment or so without qualifying then she sank back in her corner resumed her apathetic posture and sat gazing out of the window with the far away look in her eyes as if no such person as myself was in existence.

"Poor girl!" I thought and I began to wonder who or what she could be and how she came to be traveling alone. Could she have escaped from an asylum? If so how came she to be possessed of sufficient funds to procure a railway ticket?

I had had some experience in such cases and I knew that the most outrageous ones are those where the patient maintains an even sullenness of demeanor. The girl's case did not seem to me to be one of them. On the contrary her sudden change of mood when I angered her seemed to indicate it to be a case of temporary aberration of mind and consequently a lunatic one.

I looked at my watch in a quarter of an hour we should be at Basingstoke. I was in the very act of returning my watch to my pocket when my companion with a mocking laugh—the peculiar metallic ring of which it is quite impossible to describe literally buried herself upon me with overwhelming force broke the watch from its chain and sent it spinning through the window. In another second she was endeavoring to force herself also through the window.

Then commenced a terrible struggle, of which I even yet shudder to think. My muscles were strained to their utmost limit of tension. The perspiration poured down my face and my arms felt as if about to be wrenched from their sockets. And all this to restrain one of the sex commonly called the "weaker" from self destruction.

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