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How Kit's Leg was Pulled

Dr. Geo W. Ryan's Informal

by Dr. L. C. Carr

I knew there was trouble in the store for me, when they told me that Kit was to be my traveling companion and that I was to look after him during the trip.

Kit was 18 – a spoiled darling – with more money than he knew what to do with, and very fond of playing pranks on the old man, as he called me. Mama thought her slender girlish boy was too innocent for this wicked world. Still he often said that he would give me cards and spades and beat me. I never doubted the assertion.

To me, the comfort and seclusion of a sleeping coach have been a delusion nevertheless when I have a long night journey staring me in the face I invariably take a berth, a lower and middle on account of my advancing years.

Kit said he would secure a middle section and save the lower for me. I reached the train none too soon. The sleeper was crowded, every berth taken, in some cases friends had doubled up. An hour after starting I found Kit and the smoking compartment, busy with six or eight friends whom he was calling by their given names. God knows how he had formed these friendships in such a short time, but everything is possible in a sleeping car and they looked like gentlemen. As I stepped into the compartment, Kit was declaring that he could not open it, looking up he saw me.

Hello, old man he said.

“Have you secured a berth for me” I asked

“Yep” said Kit “I’m in” he continued pushing a pile of blue chips to the center of the table. Then looking up at me he again blurted out,

“Lower 8”.

“Who opened” he asked, “that gives me the edge – raise it ten–”

“Excuse me old man –busy – give me one”. Then he forgot me.

“Well Kit” I spoke rather petulantly, “let me have the ticket, but he was unaware of my presence. The betting was lively. At last one of his new friends laid down his cards. He said that he was done, and turning to me, was kind enough to inform

me, that the porter had secured all of their seats a few minutes before. I found this important individual. Explained the circumstances and asked for number eight.

“Is you sure boss” he inquired suspiciously.

“My friend informs me” I replied haughtily.

“Dar’s eight of them tickets”. He answered dubiously as he went in search of the conductor. He soon returned and gave me a piece of paste-board calling for lower eight.

As the card party had completed possession of the smoking department I made my way to the forward car, where I smoked in peace, while studying the faces about me. It was midnight when I returned to the coach. All was quiet, excepting the card party in the smoking compartment. I peeped in as I went by and saw that they were drinking. While I was retiring I marveled that a man of my disposition should be so unfortunate as to be saddled with a wild colt like Kit. While fastening my curtains the porter confidentially informed me that my young friend was having his leg pulled. I said to myself that I would not care if they he she or it pulled it out. I put up the curtain and gazed out on the dim landscape, softened and sweetened by the moon's silvery rays; then gradually fell into an uneasy slumber.

I have no recollection of what it was that aroused me, but when I open my eyes the daylight was streaming through the uncurtained window – what was that waving slowly in front of the curtain as it descended from the upper berth. I rubbed my eyes. Why it was Kit of course. What mischief did he now intend? I waited. Lower and lower it came waving slightly as if seeking a resting place. I made it out a foot and ankle and leg, Kit was trying to kick me quietly, fall back and laugh to himself as he heard me swear. I never paused to note what a fine foot and delicately molded leg the boy had, nor did I care how soft and white the skin seemed, I was too angry and determined to teach him a lesson that would prevent him from playing more tricks on me during the rest of our trip. I had in my vest pocket a small sample vial of liquid tar that was being prepared by an enterprising drug house and warranted to cure consumption. Here was an opportunity for a test. I secured it quietly. Then I grasped the descending leg by the ankle and holding it firmly with my right hand pulled down with all my strength, removing the cork with my teeth I reached up as far above the knee as possible and poured the filthy sticky liquid all over the leg and rubbed it well in with my left hand.

When I first grasped his ankle he had thrown himself back in his berth and made a desperate struggle to escape from my clutch. He uttered no sound, but I could

comprehend this effort by his suppressed breathing as well as by the strain on my hand. As I released the leg, I called up to him,

“Kit, when you learn common decency and keep your legs out of other people's berths I think that tar will come off.”

I repaired to the toilet room and with the combined aid of brush, sapolio and porter, I succeeded in getting my left hand in such condition that I was enabled to put a glove upon it.

After drinking a cup of coffee I took a seat in the smoking compartment and lighting a weed awaited results. The last to arise were those composing the card party of the preceding night. Kit strolled into the smoking room looking fresher than ever. His smooth boyish face showed no trace of care. How in the world had he ever put on his socks?

“Hello old man,” he said catching sight of me “what ails your hand have you hurt it?”

I did not answer but watched him furtively from under my lashes. He showed not the least trace of being uncomfortable.

In a few moments the porter came and called one of our party away. Ten minutes elapsed and he who had been called returned and beckoned to me. I stepped out of the smoking room.

“You are a physician?” He inquired.

I bowed my head.

“Well” He said “my errand is embarrassing. I hardly know whether to get angry or not. Here is the case. Sister and I are about to visit friends in St. Louis. She is a regular tom-boy – always playing the most boyish pranks upon me. She sent for me a few minutes ago and said that while under the impression that I was in the birth beneath her she reached down with her foot to kick me. Well I ought to have been in that birth but the porter, who took up our eight tickets at one time, got them mixed last night and I slept in lower seven instead of lower eight under my sister. I shall make no attempt to inform the club how I felt, as he continued, “whoever was there caught her foot and rubbed something like tar on her leg. She has wrapped herself up in the sheet and declares she will not get up and that she must be carried from the car placed in the carriage and so visit our friends. It will never do. Kitty must be crazy. Twould frighten our friends to death. I told her that there was a doctor in the train, but she said she would not see him. By the way she said that whoever has done this called her by her first name.

That is what puzzles me. For you see several of these young fellows are my friends and some of them are acquainted with my sister. Of course I feel this keenly but have no idea that it was an intentional insult and if I make inquiries to ascertain who occupied the lower eight I will only succeed in humiliating my sister.

I fully agreed with him and told him so frankly.

“True” he replied. I will hold my peace and bide my time. Won't you see my sister.”

I agreed but insisted on seeing her alone. Putting a couple of bandages in my pocket I repaired to the upper eight and put Kitty in condition to get on some clothes. I talked rapidly while I was doing this.

Not many days after this Kitty told me that I should have attended some other medical school, and when I asked rather indignantly what was wrong with my Alma Mater. She replied that they failed to teach Anatomy.

L. C. Carr

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