

第五章 专横的列车长

Chapter 5 An Overbearing Conductor



菲尔对列车长的指控感到困惑，因为他不清楚发生了什么事。菲尔把事情的经过向列车长说了一遍，可是列车长并不相信。菲尔拿出了立奥奈尔的字条，可是列车长仍然坚持自己的看法，并要求菲尔将戒指还给那位小姐。列车长还要把菲尔送到纽约的警察局。菲尔感到很无助。这时，坐在菲尔后边的一位老人告诉列车长，菲尔所说的都是真的。可是列车长认为老人是多管闲事。列车长很不讲道理，他认为戒指肯定是菲尔偷的，并且这事和老人无关。老人告诉列车长，他是铁路局局长理查德·格兰特，列车长疑惑地看着老人，因为这位被他轻慢的老人有权解除他的工作。他刚才欺凌弱小的行为使他现在必须卑躬屈膝，以挽救他的工作。他随即向局长道歉，并说既然菲尔不是小偷，那也没有必要找他的麻烦了。

菲尔非常感谢新朋友的帮助，在攀谈中，局长得知了菲尔的情况，他把自己的名片给了菲尔，并告诉菲尔到纽约之后可以和他联系，局长还给了菲尔 10 美元，原因是这位局长很喜欢菲尔。

菲尔为自己的幸运感到庆幸，尽管他被立奥奈尔·莱克骗了。

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面对指控，菲尔十分困惑

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No matter how honest a boy may be, a sudden charge of theft is likely to make him look confused and guilty.

Such was the case with Phil.

“I assure you,” he said earnestly, “that I did not steal this ring.”

“Where did you get it, then?” demanded the conductor roughly.

He was one of those men who, in any position, will make themselves disagreeable. Moreover, he was a man who always thought ill of others, when there was any chance of doing so. In fact, he preferred to credit his fellows with bad qualities rather than with good.

“It was handed to me by a young man who just left the car.” said Phil.

“That’s a likely story.” sneered the conductor.

“Young men are not in the habit of giving valuable rings to strangers.”

“He did not give it to me, I advanced him five dollars on it.”

“What was the young man’s name?” asked the conductor incredulously.

“There’s his name and address.” answered Phil, drawing from his pocket the paper handed to him by Mr. Lake.

“Lionel Lake, 237 Broadway,” repeated the conductor. “If there is any such person, which I very much doubt, you are probably a confederate of his.”

“You have no right to say this.” returned Phil indignantly.

“I haven’t, haven’t I?” snapped the conductor. “Do you know what I am going to do with you?”

“If you wish me to return the ring to this young lady, I will do so, if she is positive it is hers.”

“Yes you must do that, but it won’t get you out of trouble. I shall hand you over to a policeman as soon as we reach New York.”

Phil was certainly dismayed, for he felt that it might be difficult for him to prove that he came honestly in possession of the ring.

“The fact is,” added the conductor, “your story is too thin.”

“Conductor,” said a new voice, “you are doing the boy an injustice.”

The speaker was an old man with gray hair, but of form still robust, though he was at least sixty five. He sat in the seat just behind Phil.

“Thank you, sir.” said Phil gratefully.

“I understand my business,” said the conductor impertinently, “and don’t need any instructions from you.”

“Young man,” said the old gentleman, in a very dignified tone, “I have usually found officials of your class polite and gentlemanly, but you are an exception.”

“Who are you?” asked the conductor rudely. “What right have you to put in your oar?”

“As to who I am, I will answer you by and by. In reference to the boy, I have to say that his story is correct. I heard the whole

conversation between him and the young man from whom he received the ring, and I can testify that he has told the truth.”

“At any rate he has received stolen property.”

“Not knowing it to be stolen. The young man was an entire stranger to him, and though I suspected that he was an unscrupulous adventurer, the boy has not had experience enough to judge men.”

“Very well. If he’s innocent he can prove it when he’s brought to trial.” said the conductor. “As for you, sir, it’s none of your business.”

“Young man, you asked me a short time since who I am. Do you want to know?”

“I am not very particular.”

“Then, sir, I have to inform you that I am Richard Grant, the president of this road.”

The conductor’s face was a curious and interesting study when he heard this announcement. He knew that the old man whom he had insulted had a right to discharge him from his position, and bully as he had shown himself, he was now inclined to humble himself to save his place.

“I beg your pardon, sir,” he said in a composed tone. “If I had known who you were I wouldn’t have spoken as I did.”

“I had a claim to be treated like a gentleman, even if I had no connection with the road.” he said.

“If you say the boy’s all right, I won’t interfere with him.”

continued the conductor.

“My testimony would clear him from any charge that might be brought against him,” said the president. “I saw him enter the car, and know he has had no opportunity to take the ring.”

“If he’ll give me back the ring, that’s all I want.” said the young lady.

“That I am willing to do, though I lose five dollars by it.” said Phil.

“Do so, my boy,” said the president. “I take it for granted that the young lady’s claim is a just one.”

Upon this Phil drew the ring from his finger and handed it to the young lady, who went back to the car where her friends were sitting.

“I hope, sir,” said the conductor anxiously, “that you won’t be prejudiced against me on account of this affair.”

“I am sorry to say that I can’t help feeling prejudiced against you,” returned the president dryly, “but I won’t allow this feeling to injure you if, upon inquiring, I find that you are otherwise an efficient officer.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“I am glad that my presence has saved this boy from being the victim of an injustice. Let this be a lesson to you in future.”

The conductor walked away, looking quite chopfallen, and Phil turned to his new friend.

“I am very much indebted to you, sir,” he said. “But for you I should have found myself in serious trouble.”

“I am glad to have prevented an injustice, my lad. I am sorry I could not save you from loss also. That enterprising rogue has gone off with five dollars belonging to you. I hope the loss will not be a serious one to you.”

“It was more than a third part of my capital, sir.” said Phil, rather ruefully.

“I am sorry for that. I suppose, however, you are not dependent upon your own resources?”

“Yes, sir, I am.”

“Have you no parents, then?” asked Mr. Grant, with interest.

“No, sir; that is, I have a stepmother.”

“And what are your plans, if you are willing to tell me?”

“I am going to New York to try to make a living.”

“I cannot commend your plan, my young friend, unless there is a good reason for it.”

“I think there is a good reason for it, sir.”

“I hope you have not run away from home?”

“No, sir, I left home with my stepmother’s knowledge and consent.”

“That is well. I don’t want wholly to discourage you, and so I will tell you that I, too, came to New York at your age with the same object in view, with less money in my pocket than you

possess.”

“And now you are the president of a railroad!” said Phil hopefully.

“Yes; but I had a hard struggle before I reached that position.”

“I am not afraid of hard work, sir.”

“That is in your favor. Perhaps you may be as lucky as I have been. You may call at my office in the city, if you feel inclined.”

As Mr. Grant spoke he put in Phil’s hand a card bearing his name and address, in Wall Street.

“Thank you, sir,” said Phil gratefully. “I shall be glad to call. I may need advice.”

“If you seek advice and follow it you will be an exception to the general rule.” said the president, smiling. “One thing more—you have met with a loss which, to you, is a serious one. Allow me to bear it, and accept this bill.”

“But, sir, it is not right that you should bear it.” commenced Phil. Then, looking at the bill, he said: “Haven’t you made a mistake? This is a ten-dollar bill.”

“I know it. Accept the other five as an evidence of my interest in you. By the way, I go to Philadelphia and Washington before my return to New York, and shall not return for three or four days. After that time you will find me at my office.”

“I am in luck after all,” thought Phil cheerfully, “in spite of the mean trick of Mr. Lionel Lake.”