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THE
SMOKING
CAR
W·D·HOWELLS

The Smoking Car

A F A R C E

By *W. D. Howells*



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The Smoking-Car

A FARCE

In the smoking-car of a suburban train on the Boston and Albany Railroad, in the Albany Depot at Boston. MR. EDWARD ROBERTS is seated, deeply absorbed in a book which he is reading. He has a pile of newspapers and magazines beside him, and he rests an absent hand on them. The seat in front is opened toward him, and he keeps a foot against its edge with the effect of laying claim to it, while a YOUNG MOTHER, with a child in her arms, enters hastily and looks distractedly about. There is no one else in the

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car, and after walking its length she returns and addresses herself anxiously to
MR. ROBERTS.

I

ROBERTS AND THE YOUNG MOTHER

The Young Mother: "Is this the car for Newton Centre?"

Roberts, starting wildly from his book: "Newton Centre? Why, I don't know; I presume so; yes. Yes, I think so. I'm going to Newton Centre myself. It *is* the car for Newton Centre, is n't it?"

The Young Mother: "The brakeman said it was."

Roberts: "Oh, well, then, it must be. Why" —

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The Young Mother: “Because my husband’s coming to go with me and I did n’t want to get into the wrong car. He had to run back to the store for some things.” She approaches Roberts, and looks down at the seats before and beside him. “But if you’re going there, it must be all right. Is this seat occupied?”

Roberts: “Well, not at present. I’m expecting some friends, but” —

The Young Mother: “Oh, well, all right, then. Should you mind if I put my baby down by you here a minute?”

Roberts, reluctantly, but more absently than reluctantly: “Why, no; I suppose not.”

The Young Mother, with an air of

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explanation: "You see, I've got to go and get my bag. I had it sent over from the boat—we just got in this morning, off the boat, you know—the Bangor boat; and it's so heavy—I'll have to hunt it up at the express office, any way—that it don't seem as if I could manage both at the same time; and I don't know but what I'll telegraph to my husband's folks that we've got here, too. I would n't ask to leave her with you, but there don't seem to be anybody else I *can* ask, and I don't believe she'll make you any *great* trouble. May I?"

Roberts: "Why, yes; of course—that is, certainly, if"—

The Young Mother: "Oh, I don't believe she'll cry, and I shan't be gone

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but a minute, any way." Roberts does not offer to remove the papers at his side, and the young mother, after smoothing the baby's dress carefully under her, puts her down on top of them. "Now, baby, don't you cry. Mamma will be back in a minute. Good-by! Good-by!" She retreats a few steps, and flutters her hand at the baby. "Goo, goo! Smile a little! Smile for the gentleman! There! She'll be all right, and I'll be right back. Do you know where the baggage-express office is?"

Roberts, in a daze: "It's in the station, I think."

The Young Mother: "Right close to the place where the New York train stops?"

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Roberts : “ Yes, yes — I think so, I believe so — yes, it is.”

The Young Mother : “ That ’s what the black man that calls the trains said ; but I thought I ’d better make sure, because there ain’t much time to lose. Don’t you topple over, baby ! ” She runs forward and saves the baby from falling against the side of the seat from the top of the magazines. “ There ! Mamma just caught you, did n’t she ? ” To *Roberts* : “ If you don’t mind, I ’ll just throw these things on to the seat in front of you, and then she ’ll sit steadier.” She lifts the baby, and flings *Roberts*’s papers upon the other seat, and then replaces the baby at his side. “ Now she ’ll do nicely. I ’m so glad I happened to think of it before I went,

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for she might have fallen forward just as well as sideways; and it — *would* you mind putting your hand round her a *little* mite so as to keep her up? She *is* so wiggly!” Roberts glares stupidly up through his glasses and she takes hold of his arm and passes it round the baby. “If you ’ll excuse me! There! Now she *will* do.” She moves backward to the door of the car again, waving her hand at the baby. “By-by, precious! Don’t you be afraid! Mamma ’ll be back as soon as she’s got her bag. Goo, goo! Goo, goo!” She disappears through the door, but instantly reappears. “Do you know how soon it starts?”

Roberts, stupidly: “What starts?”

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The Young Mother : “ Why, the car? ”

Roberts : “ Oh! Oh, yes! The train! I don't know.”

The Young Mother : “ Does it start at half past nine, exactly? ”

Roberts : “ I'm sure, I don't know. Yes, yes! I believe it does. Yes, my friends were to take the 9.30.”

The Young Mother, laughing : “ You seem to be pretty easy for a person that was to meet friends. I sh'd been in a perfect fidge to know whether I'd got the right train.” *Roberts* makes no response to her remark, and a doubt rushes visibly into the young mother's face. “ You're sure it *is* the car for Newton Centre? ”

Roberts, with some spirit : “ I think

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I said that I was going to Newton Centre myself.”

The Young Mother: “Yes, that’s what you *said*. But you might have got the wrong car. I *guess* it’s all right, though. And you think this is the one that goes at half past nine?”

Roberts, looking mechanically at his watch: “Yes, yes! Half past nine!”

The Young Mother: “Good gracious! Is it half past nine already? Then there won’t be time to” —

Roberts: “No, no! It is n’t half past nine; its only ten minutes past.”

The Young Mother: “Well, that’s nice. And this is the half past nine *train*?”

Roberts: “Yes, that’s what I meant.”

The Young Mother, returning a few

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steps within: "I questioned the black man that calls out the trains in the waiting-room pretty close up about it, and he said it *was*. But he might have made a mistake, because he has to keep so many on his mind. I asked him if he did n't, oftentimes; but he says that's just the reason he never does. I told *him* that I should go perfectly distracted; and I cautioned him about my husband coming to meet me on the 9:30 train, and he said there could n't be any mistake about it. Do you suppose there could?"

Roberts: "About what?"

The Young Mother: "About the train."

Roberts: "Oh, none whatever; not

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the least in the world. It's the train for Newton Centre, I'm quite certain."

The Young Mother : "The 9:30?"

Roberts : "Yes, the 9:30."

The Young Mother : "And what time did you say it was now?"

Roberts : "I'm sure I don't know."

The Young Mother : "Why, you just looked at your watch!"

Roberts : "Did I? I thought you wanted to know what train it was."

The Young Mother, after a moment's doubt, in a burst of kindly perception and confidence : "Well, I guess your friends *better* come! But it's like John, half the time, and I guess most men are just so, if the truth was known. It's a comfort to feel that you can be trusted

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in spite of yourselves. Won't you see what time it is again, please?"

Roberts, looking at his watch again :
"Ten minutes after nine."

The Young Mother, easily : "Oh, well, then!" She returns and pulls the baby's clothing straight over the toes of her small shoes, kisses her, hugs her, and kisses her again. "There! Now, I *will* go! And if my husband *should* happen to come in while I'm gone, will you tell him I'm just out hunting for my bag?"

Roberts : "Yes, yes. I shan't forget."

The Young Mother, in a burst of good feeling : "I *guess* I can trust you. I should like to tell your wife about your looking at your watch for the day

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of the week, if it's her that's coming to meet you, and have a real good laugh with her." She beams kindly though somewhat patronizingly upon Roberts, as she retreats once more toward the door. "By-by, baby! I'll be right back. I don't know but I'd better tell *her* to look after *you*." She laughs toward Roberts, as if this were a joke which he must enjoy with her, and vanishes through the door of the car just as Mr. Willis Campbell enters by the door at the other end. He walks down the car toward Roberts, approaching him from behind.

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II

CAMPBELL AND ROBERTS

Campbell : "Hello, Roberts! What are you doing in the smoker?" He leans over Roberts to put various parcels into the rack, without observing the baby. "You'll be taking to drink next."

Roberts, vaguely: "Is this the smoker?"

Campbell : "It's going to be, as soon as I can light a cigar. But I don't know what you'll say to Agnes when she finds you here, wreathed in a cloud of tobacco. She's coming with Amy, is n't she?"

Roberts : "Yes, I think she said so."

Campbell : "Well, I'll tell you what,

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Roberts: you think too much; you ought to *know* something. Now, even *I* know that those two women are coming down here to join us, and they 'll go flying about like a couple of distracted hens when they don't find you. They 'll never think of looking for you here, and they don't want me, and they 'll be in an awful flutter."

Roberts, anxiously: "Perhaps I'd better go into another car."

Campbell: "No; this would be a good place to have it out with them. There won't be anybody else here, probably, and it will be quite like your own fireside. One of the few advantages of going home with you and Agnes, when you 've been in over night with us, is that you can have the smoker all to

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yourself in the morning. The commuters don't begin going out till afternoon, and probably there won't be a soul at this hour to interrupt a family row. Still, I don't know but it would be safest to divide up, and you go into another car, as you don't smoke." He continues to fit parcels into the racks as he talks.

Roberts: "Yes; I really think it would, but I don't know what to do with this" — He glances down at the baby.

Campbell, heaving a final bundle into the rack: "There! *That's* done for." He turns about and follows Roberts's glance. "Hello! What's that? Why, I was just going to sit on it! Did you find it here?"

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Roberts : “ No, no ; it was left here — it was put in my charge — that is ” —

Campbell : “ Who left it ? ”

Roberts, with spirit : “ Who left it ? Why, its mother, of course ! ”

Campbell : “ Its mother ? Where is she ? ”

Roberts : “ I ’m sure I don’t know. She went out to get her bag at the express office, and she ’ll be back directly.”

Campbell, sitting down in the seat before Roberts and the baby, and confronting Roberts and the baby with a hard, judicial aspect : “ How long has she been gone ? ”

Roberts : “ She went out just as you came in. She has n’t been gone a moment.”

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Campbell : “ And she asked if she might leave the baby here with you while she was gone ? ”

Roberts : “ Yes. ”

Campbell : “ And you said she might. ”

Roberts : “ I could n't very well refuse. I let her leave it, of course. ”

Campbell : “ Of course. ” He relents so far as to make a silent inventory of the baby's features and draperies. “ It 's rather a nice little thing. ”

Roberts, with relief : “ Yes, and it 's been very good. ”

Campbell : “ Oh, it has n't had time to be bad yet, if its mother 's just gone out. ” After a moment : “ Besides, it 's probably drugged. ”

Roberts, in alarm : “ Drugged ? ”

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Campbell: "They usually drug them when they leave them that way."

Roberts: "What do you mean by 'leave them that way'?"

Campbell: "Oh, nothing. Hello! it's going off!"

Roberts, grappling with the child: "Going off! Good heavens! She was afraid I should let it fall."

Campbell: "I don't mean that. It's going to sleep; don't you see? It is drugged! No wonder it's so good. Well, I congratulate you, Roberts."

Roberts, angrily: "Congratulate me? What do you mean, Willis?"

Campbell: "I don't know what Agnes will say to your taking such a responsibility without consulting her, but if you would *do* it, why I don't believe

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you could have adopted a prettier child.”

Roberts : “ Adopted ! ”

Campbell : “ Do you mean to say you did n't know what you were about ? In this paragraphic age, when every other day you might read of young mothers getting unwary strangers to hold their babies a moment, and then walking off and never coming back, do you mean to tell me you did n't know what game that woman was playing ? Well, *you* ought to be left with somebody, and I've half a mind to adopt you myself. That's all.” He falls back against the seat, opens a newspaper, and makes a show of reading it. Roberts leans forward and desperately rends it from him.

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Roberts : “ Willis, do you suppose — do you think ” —

Campbell : “ Oh, I let *you* do the thinking. I simply *know*. I don't go beyond that. I leave thinking to men of intellect. I'm nothing but a business man.”

Roberts : “ And what do you know ? ”

Campbell : “ Oh, nothing. Merely that you 're in for it ! ”

Roberts, sternly : “ Do you mean that — that — poor creature has abandoned her child, and is n't coming back any more ? ”

Campbell : “ Well, not if you ask it in that threatening way, my dear fellow. I did n't put her up to it.”

Roberts : “ Well, it 's preposterous ! She could hardly tear herself from it.

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She came back again and again, to kiss it, and ” —

Campbell: “ Oh, I dare say! The natural feeling would assert itself at the last moment. I suppose I should do just so myself if I were a mother and meant to abandon my child. You could n't expect less of her.”

Roberts: “ But what possible motive could she have for abandoning her child? Why should she do such a monstrous ” —

Campbell: “ Oh, well, there are various reasons. Perhaps her husband had abandoned *her* ; or she may have been a young widow with no means of supporting it. There are always good grounds for a mother's deserting her in-

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fant when she does do it. What sort of a looking person was she?"

Roberts: "I don't know. Very good-looking, I believe."

Campbell: "Oh!"

Roberts: "And young — and nicely dressed — very respectable in appearance" —

Campbell: "Ah!"

Roberts: "And smiling, and" —

Campbell: "Of course; she had to put that on, poor thing! It would n't have done to let you see how heart-broken she really was. That would have roused even *your* misgivings. Was she what you would have called a lady?"

Roberts, thoughtfully: "Not — not

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exactly : not in the society sense, that is. I should say she was a nice village person — the wife of a prosperous mechanic. She spoke of her husband's 'folks.' ”

Campbell : “Precisely. Well, all you've got to do now is to reconcile Agnes to the inevitable. She'll come round in time, but of course ” —

Roberts, with an effort for lightness : “Oh, come now, Willis ; there's enough of this. I don't mind a joke, but there's such a thing as carrying it too far.”

Campbell : “Ah, that's what you ought to have said to the unnatural mother.” He leans forward and looks closely at the infant. “Do you suppose there's any mark on its clothing, or

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any little note tucked in anywhere that would form a clew?"

Roberts, faltering: "I don't know. I never thought" —

Campbell: "Then, for once, you ought to have thought. Better look" —

Roberts: "But I can't. I am afraid that if I disturb her she may" —

Campbell: "Cry? Very likely. But you must do something, you know. Could n't you pass your hand — I don't believe you'll wake her — softly over her, and if anything crackles like paper" — *Roberts* acts upon this suggestion, so far as may be without risk to the child's tranquillity. "No! All is silent. Well, then, the only thing is, should you know the mother again if you saw her?"

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Roberts : “ I don’t believe I should. Would you — would you go out and look for her ? ”

Campbell : “ But if you would n’t know her when you saw her ? ”

Roberts : “ That’s true ! But something must be done ! What would *you* do ? ”

Campbell : “ Why, if you don’t really want to keep the poor little thing, or if you don’t suppose Agnes ” —

Roberts : “ No, no ; impossible ! It is n’t to be thought of ! ” He has got to his feet, and is standing over Campbell in great excitement, while Campbell remains calm.

Campbell : “ Then, I ’ll tell you what you can do, and it’s the only thing you can do. You’d better take the baby,

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and run through the crowd; and perhaps, if the mother sees you, — she'll be hanging about remorsefully, — she may relent and want it back."

Roberts, catching up the child from the seat: "Would you — would you — try leaving it with the brakeman, 'first? He might have noticed what sort of looking person she was, and" —

Campbell, tolerantly: "Yes, you might try that." *Roberts* rushes from the car with the little one, while *Campbell* fastens his face to the car window, and expresses in vivid pantomime his pleasure in some spectacle without. He turns as *Roberts* reënters the car, with the child in his arms. "Well?"

Roberts, breathlessly: "He won't do it. He says it is n't his business to look

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out for passengers' children, and I'd better find its mother, if I can!"

Campbell: "The heartless ruffian! But you see, now, don't you?"

Roberts: "Yes, yes! I see! You're probably right. But what would you do now?"

Campbell: "I don't see what's left, except to do what the brakeman and I have advised."

Roberts: "And if I can't find her?"

Campbell: "Then you'll have to bring the baby back, and throw yourself on Agnes's mercy. Or, hold on! Yes, I think you might try that; you might try leaving it at the package window. Very likely they'd take charge of it there, if you checked it, and keep it till the mother called for it. But

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most probably you 'll find her, and when she sees that you are determined not to be put upon, perhaps" —

Roberts : " And — and — you don't think it would be better for me to leave the baby here with you, and run out and look for its mother myself ? "

Campbell : " I *know* it would n't. The whole moral effect upon her would be lost without the baby. Besides, how would you know her ? You must take the baby for the moral effect upon her. "

Roberts, with despairing conviction : " That is true ! " He rushes out again, and again Campbell attaches himself to the window, while from the other end of the car Mrs. Roberts and Mrs. Campbell advance falteringly and doubtfully toward him, with many diffident looks

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to the right and left. They seem to decide simultaneously that the figure at the window is Campbell, for they start vividly forward.

III

MRS. ROBERTS, MRS. CAMPBELL, AND
CAMPBELL

Mrs. Campbell : “ Willis ! ”

Mrs. Roberts : “ Where is Edward ? We ’ve been all through the train, and ” —

Mrs. Campbell : “ We can’t find him anywhere. We knew we should find *you* in the smoking-car, and so I brought Agnes right in. Haven’t you seen him ? ”

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Campbell: "Why, certainly. Have n't you?" He turns and faces them hardily.

Mrs. Campbell: "Of course we have n't. Do you think we'd ask if we had?"

Mrs. Roberts: "What do you mean, Willis? Has he been here?"

Campbell: "Yes, I thought you must have met him. He has n't been gone a moment. He's just gone out with the baby."

Mrs. Roberts: "The baby? What baby?"

Campbell: "That's just what Roberts is going to find out if he can. He's looking for the mother."

Mrs. Roberts: "Willis, dear, don't tease! What do you mean by the mother?"

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Campbell : “ What does anybody mean by the mother? The mother of the baby. Roberts is out looking for the mother who left the baby. Isn't that plain enough? ”

Mrs. Campbell, pouncingly : “ No, Willis, that is *not* enough! And I want you to stop your teasing, and tell us what you mean by a mother leaving her baby. Where did she leave it? ”

Campbell : “ Here. ”

Mrs. Campbell : “ When? ”

Campbell : “ About ten minutes ago. ”

Mrs. Campbell : “ What for? ”

Campbell : “ Ah, there you have me. ”

Mrs. Campbell : “ Willis, if you don't answer me, I shall make a scene and disgrace you before the whole car. I

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am not going to be trifled with any longer.”

Campbell : “ I don’t blame you, Amy. I should n’t like it myself. As long as there ’s nobody but Agnes in the car I shan’t mind your making a scene, and as we ’re likely to have the smoker to ourselves on a 9 : 30 train, why not sit down and wait here till Roberts gets back ? ”

Mrs. Campbell, firmly : “ No, we shall not sit down, or anything, till you explain yourself. Now, don’t go on with that nonsense about the mother and the baby, because we won’t *stand* it.”

Campbell : “ Then what *shall* I go on with ? ”

Mrs. Roberts : “ Oh, go on with *anything*, Willis ! ”

Campbell : “ Very well, then, all that

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I can say is that I found Roberts here, five minutes ago, in charge of a baby — or child of a year — which he said had been left with him by its mother, while she went out to look up her baggage at the express office.”

Both Ladies : “ Well ? ”

Campbell : “ Well, after a few moments’ conversation with me he took the child and went out to look up the mother.”

Mrs. Campbell : “ But why did he do that ? ”

Mrs. Roberts : “ Why did n’t he simply wait till she came back ? ”

Campbell : “ Perhaps he thought she was n’t coming back.”

Mrs. Roberts : “ Oh, nonsense, Willis ! ”

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Campbell : “ Oh, very well ! ”

Mrs. Campbell, visibly shaken :
“ They really do it sometimes, Agnes. I ’ve read about it myself. But ” —

Mrs. Roberts : “ Well, they never do it in the world. It does n’t stand to reason, Amy. If Willis were a mother himself he would n’t even suggest such a thing ! ”

Mrs. Campbell, with conviction : “ Of course he would n’t. And if this is one of his miserable jokes ” —

Campbell : “ Well, I don’t pretend to be a mother, but I hope I understand the feelings of a man, and I assure you that I would n’t joke on such a subject.”

Mrs. Campbell : “ Then what *are* you joking about ? ”

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Campbell : “ I am not joking at all.”

Mrs. Roberts, visibly daunted : “ I can't believe the wretched creature would really do it. Why did n't you ask the brakeman if he had noticed where she went ? ”

Campbell : “ Well, that 's what Roberts did, and he wanted to leave the baby with him, but the brakeman said he had better find the mother himself — if he could. Roberts came back to report, and then he went out again. I suppose if he *can't* find her, you 'll have to keep it, Agnes. It's a pretty little creature, and it seemed good. Hello! Here it comes, bringing Roberts with it!” Roberts enters the car flustered and dazed, with the signs of anxiety and disappointment filling his face, and

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drops of perspiration starting from his brow. "Well, where *was* she?"

IV

ROBERTS AND THE OTHERS

Mrs. Campbell: "Did you find her? What did she say?"

Mrs. Roberts: "Why did n't you leave the baby with her?"

Mrs. Campbell: "Why did n't she come back with you?"

Roberts, frantically: "Because I did n't find her. I've been to the express office and everywhere."

Campbell, to *Mrs. Roberts*: "You see!"

Mrs. Roberts: "But you *must* find her, Edward!"

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Campbell : “ Did you try leaving it at the package window ? ”

Roberts : “ No ; I couldn't quite bring myself to that. ”

Mrs. Campbell : “ Of course you could n't ! And nobody but Willis could have the heart to suggest such an inhuman thing. The package window ! ” She drops on one knee before Roberts, who sits supporting the baby in his lap, and begins to study it. “ Poor little creature ! How good it is ; and it's perfectly lovely, with those big blue eyes ; and it's as clean as a pin. Why, it's charming, and it is n't the least afraid. Just see it, Agnes ! ”

Campbell : “ Yes, Roberts said its mother had beautiful eyes and an attractive smile, and was nicely dressed. He

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seemed to have noticed everything about her.”

Mrs. Campbell, still considering the baby: “You can see what a good mother she is. Of course she is n’t rich, but it’s all the better cared for on that account. She has n’t left it to any horrid shirk of a nurse. It’s as sweet as a little pink, is n’t it, Agnes?”

Mrs. Roberts, leaning forward in some distraction: “Oh, yes; it shows the mother’s touch. Was she young, Edward?”

Roberts: “I don’t know — I think so — I did n’t notice — quite girlish, I should say. She kept coming back to take leave of it.”

Campbell: “I tell him that was the remorse working in her.”

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Mrs. Campbell: “Nonsense! She never meant to leave it in the world.”

Campbell: “Then why does n’t she come back?” It’s twenty minutes past nine, now.”

Mrs. Campbell: “Very well, then; something has happened to her!”

Mrs. Roberts: “Oh, something *must* have happened to her. Why does n’t some one go out and look for her? It seems so terrible for us to be keeping her baby here and not knowing what has happened to her.”

Campbell: “But if nothing has happened” —

Mrs. Campbell: “Don’t *hint* such a thing. You *know* there has. You ought to go out and see!”

Campbell: “I? Roberts ought to

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go and see. I should n't know her if I found her."

Mrs. Roberts : "Oh, do go, Willis! Poor Edward is all worn out. Look at him!" Roberts has fallen back in extreme dejection and exhaustion, and he supports the baby on his knee with so lax a hand that it topples forward. The ladies scream, and Campbell catches it from him.

Campbell : "Look what you're about, Roberts! You're not fit to have an abandoned child left with you. Bless my soul, it's off again!"

The Ladies : "Off?"

Campbell : "Yes, it's going to sleep."

Mrs. Campbell : "So it is, poor little forsaken soul! Let me take it."

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Mrs. Roberts : “The little darling !”
As *Mrs. Campbell* possesses herself of the baby : “Be careful, Amy !”

Campbell : “It was asleep when *Roberts* went out with it. *Roberts* thinks it’s drugged.”

Roberts : “No, no, *Willis* ; you suggested that. Though it is strange it sleeps so much. She said they were right off the boat, and perhaps they did n’t sleep well during the night.”

Mrs. Campbell, pressing her face into the baby’s : “To be sure they did n’t, poor things !”

Campbell : “And the mother may have fallen asleep in the express office with her bag in her arms. That would account for her not coming back.”

Mrs. Campbell, not minding him :

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“ If she does n’t come back I shall keep it myself.”

Campbell : “ Not if I know it, Mrs. Campbell. That baby is *my* property.”

Mrs. Roberts : “ But if her mother left her with Edward ” —

Campbell : “ It was because I had n’t come in yet. She ’d never have left her with Roberts if she ’d seen *me*. What shall we call her, Amy ? ”

Mrs. Campbell : “ No, no! We must n’t think of it, till we ’ve left no stone unturned. You must go out and look for her, Willis, and if you don’t find her ” —

Campbell : “ But have n’t I told you that I should n’t know her if I saw her ? ”

Mrs. Campbell : “ It does n’t matter about your not knowing her. She ’ll

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know you if you have the baby with you.”

Campbell : “ Have the baby with me ? Ha, ha, ha ! I think I see myself running about with a baby in my arms asking people for its mother ! ”

Mrs. Campbell : “ You made Edward do it.”

Campbell : “ That was another thing. She left it with him.”

Mrs. Campbell : “ But you said she would have left it with you if she had seen you first, and now you must take it.” She tries to push it into his arms.

Campbell : “ Oh, come, now ! You don't want to make me ridiculous, Amy ! ”

Mrs. Roberts : “ You would n't really be ridiculous. I'm sure that any one

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who saw you, and knew what you were doing to save a poor woman from despair, would praise you up to the skies for it."

Roberts : " I really think you could manage it better than I, Willis ; you are so ready, and you know how to take people so cleverly. Nobody would think of making a joke of you."

Campbell : " Oh would n't they !"

Mrs. Campbell : " And if they did, it ought n't to make the least difference to you. You ought to be glad of it. And, at any rate, you've got to go." She makes him take the child from her.

Mrs. Roberts : " Yes, Willis, you *must* ! Poor Edward is perfectly gone."

Campbell : " Well, so am I." He

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suddenly drops the baby into Roberts's lap, and makes a start toward the door. The two ladies fling themselves in his way with one cry of protest and despair.

Mrs. Roberts and *Mrs. Campbell*:
"Willis!"

Mrs. Roberts: "You won't refuse such a *little* thing, Willis!"

Mrs. Campbell: "If he does, I will never speak to him again!"

Campbell: "Oh, very well, then, if it comes to that! Here, give her to me." He seizes the baby from Roberts and dashes from the car, laughing.

V

MRS. CAMPBELL, MRS. ROBERTS, ROBERTS

Mrs. Roberts: "There, I knew he

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would, if we could only appeal to his better nature.”

Mrs. Campbell: “I *hope* it’s his better nature. But I did n’t like his laughing.”

Roberts: “That may have been merely nervous; it made *me* nervous. But Willis manages these things so well; he’s so full of resource. I feel quite sure he’ll find her.”

Mrs. Roberts, pressing to the window and looking out: “He’s disappeared already! I should n’t like to look for any one in that crowded station. He *is* energetic.”

Mrs. Campbell, joining her: “He knew that I was in earnest. But I don’t want to make him feel ridiculous. If I’d thought he really cared — But

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something had to be done, and done instantly. Did they laugh at *you*, Mr. Roberts?"

Roberts: "Well, I can't say laugh, exactly. No, I don't think I could say they laughed outright. But when I ran about, and asked if they had seen anybody — any lady — who had left her baby with a gentleman in the smoking-car, while she went out to look up her bag at the express office, they smiled."

Mrs. Campbell: "I suppose it did amuse them; men are so peculiar. I hope I was n't too precipitate with poor Willis. But I knew that he could do something if he was forced to it."

Roberts: "Yes, he'll come out of it all right, with his tact and invention. He'll find her, easily enough."

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Mrs. Roberts, in a transport of triumph: "He *has* found her! There he is, coming back, without the baby!"

Mrs. Campbell: "Where? Oh, yes; I see him! I do believe he *has* found her; and now I owe him any reparation that he chooses to ask. I'll confess that I was wrong to send him. He *is* good, is n't he, Agnes?"

Mrs. Roberts: "He's beautiful! And you are just the wife for him, Amy. You do appreciate him."

Roberts: "Willis is magnificent. I envy him his executive ability."

All Three, as Campbell enters the car, turning from the window: "Well?"

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VI

CAMPBELL AND THE OTHERS

Mrs. Campbell : “ Where did you find her ? ”

Mrs. Roberts : “ What did she say ? ”

Roberts : “ How did you know her ? ”

Campbell : “ Nowhere ; and nothing ; and I did n't. ”

Mrs. Campbell : “ Then what did you do ? ”

Mrs. Roberts : “ Where is the baby ? ”

Roberts : “ How did you get rid of it ? ”

Campbell : “ The way you ought to have done, my dear fellow. I left it with the matron — or whatever she is — of the ladies' waiting-room. ”

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Mrs. Roberts : “ Oh Willis ! ”

Mrs. Campbell : “ And here we had been praising you so, and I was sorry that I had made you go ! Well, that is what I get for ever regretting that I treated you badly.”

Roberts : “ You think it will occur to the mother to inquire of the matron ” —

Campbell : “ She won't make any inquiries ! Or if, by one chance in a thousand, she wants her baby again, and makes a row for it after our train's gone, the matron is the very first person she'll be sent to. I thought it all out. In the other event, it will be handed over to the proper authorities and sent to the Derelict Infants' Home — or something. At any rate, it's off *our* hands.”

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Mrs. Campbell : “ Indeed it is n’t. If she does n’t come for her baby, I ’m going to keep it myself.”

Campbell : “ You ? Why you ’re worse than Roberts.”

Mrs. Campbell : “ I don’t care who I ’m worse than. Agnes does n’t want it, for she ’s got children of her own, and so you may go straight and bring it back here. Do, Willis ! I ’m truly in earnest. If that poor thing should come here for her baby before you brought it back, I don’t know what I should say to excuse you.”

Campbell : “ Oh, I could trust you to think of something.”

Mrs. Campbell : “ Don’t tease, dearest, and *do* run ! ”

Mrs. Roberts : “ Yes, Willis, you

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must. It would be shocking to have her come for it, and we have to make some sort of lame explanation. Hurry as fast as you can. It must be nearly train time.”

Roberts, looking at his watch: “Yes, it’s five minutes of it. But that’s plenty of time for Willis — if he does n’t delay.”

Campbell: “Oh, hello! Don’t *you* join in, Roberts. It was you who got us all into this trouble, and now I’m going to let you go and get the baby from the matron yourself. There’s plenty of time for you, if you don’t stand here dilly-dallying.”

Roberts: “But the matron would n’t know me, and she would n’t give it to me.”

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Campbell : “ I guess she ’ll give it to anybody that asks for it.”

Mrs. Campbell : “ Very well, then I ’ll go for it myself. After this, don’t pretend that you have the least regard for me. Don’t try to stop me !”

Campbell, interposing himself between his wife and the door : “ Only over my prostrate form, Amy. I ’m going. Your reasoning has convinced me ; but you know that if we adopt this child I am not going to take care of it.”

Mrs. Campbell : “ No, no, Willis. I shall never ask you. I assume the whole responsibility. Oh, how sweet you are ! You always come round in the end.”

Campbell : “ I always listen to reason, even when I ’m going to make a

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fool of myself. But suppose somebody's got it away from the matron on false pretences, and I can't bring it?"

Mrs. Campbell : "Don't come back without it!"

Campbell : "Oh, very well." He rushes out.

VII

MRS. CAMPBELL, MRS. ROBERTS, ROBERTS

Mrs. Campbell, watching him through the window: "He did hate to go!" Turning to *Mrs. Roberts*: "Perhaps I've been rash, Agnes."

Mrs. Roberts: "No, not in the least, Amy. I should have been just so with Edward, and he would have hated it

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quite as much as Willis; would n't you, Edward?"

Roberts: "Oh, quite. It would have been extremely disagreeable."

Mrs. Campbell: "Then I wish you had spoken before, Mr. Roberts. I did n't want to treat Willis worse than Agnes would have treated you. I am sure we have both, Willis and I, tried to consider you in the matter."

Roberts: "Of course. You certainly have, and I am very grateful for your kindness. But you know I did n't like to interfere, exactly."

Mrs. Roberts: "Edward is always very careful in such matters."

Mrs. Campbell: "Oh, I am sure he meant well. But if Willis had been in his place and you in mine, I think Willis

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would have said something to stop me — or you, I mean.”

Mrs. Roberts: “I hope you don’t blame poor Edward, Amy, if you have been a little harsh with Willis.”

Mrs. Campbell: “Then you think I *have* been harsh! Well, I must say I did n’t expect this of you, Agnes, when I was doing it all to relieve Edward of a difficulty.”

Mrs. Roberts: “You know I did n’t mean to reproach you, Amy.”

Roberts: “And we both thoroughly appreciate what you and Willis have done. I’m sure I don’t know what would have become of *me* without your help — or his.”

Mrs. Campbell: “Oh, I assume nothing for myself.” She takes out her

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handkerchief and wipes her eyes with a swift dash, and then runs it back into her pocket. "Don't regard *me*, please! But I wish the next time you think I am making Willis make a fool of himself, you would n't hesitate to say so."

Mrs. Roberts, glancing out of the window: "There! There he is coming back."

Mrs. Campbell, springing to the window beside her: "Don't tell me he is n't bringing the baby! Yes, yes! He's got it. And now I forgive him everything. I'm sure I don't know what we shall do with it."

Mrs. Roberts: "Why, I thought you wanted to adopt it, Amy."

Mrs. Campbell: "Not if it's been

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the cause of my making Willis make a fool of himself. I should always detest the sight of it." She turns to encounter her husband, as he enters the car, red and perspiring, with the child in his arms. "Had she come for it? Did the matron give it up willingly? Were you very ridiculous, Willis? Did she laugh at you? What did you say to her?"

VIII

CAMPBELL, AND THE OTHERS

Campbell, sinking breathless into the seat beside her: "One thing at a time, my dear, and nothing till I've got my wind." He pursues, panting: "There had n't been any rush for her, not even on the part of the unnatural mother,

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and I dare say I was more a fool than I looked.”

Mrs. Roberts, fondly and proudly: “Oh, you *could n't* be, Willis, dear!”

Campbell: “Thank you, Agnes, you are always so flattering. But the main point is that I got the baby back for you, and here it is, Amy, and the sooner you take it— Hello!” They all start into listening postures, while an excited and anxious woman's voice makes itself heard from without in apparent parley with the brakeman on the platform:—

The Woman's Voice: “Is this the half past nine o'clock train for Newton Centre?”

The Brakeman's Voice: “Well, for that and about twenty other places.”

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The Woman's Voice : "The half past nine?"

The Brakeman's Voice : "Yes, ma'am."

The Woman's Voice : "You're sure it has n't gone?"

The Brakeman's Voice : "Well, I won't be, in about two minutes."

The Woman's Voice : "Oh, my gracious! Which is the smoking-car?"

The Brakeman's Voice : "This is."

The Woman's Voice : "And was there a lady, here, about half an hour ago, that came out and told you she had left her baby in the car with a strange gentleman, and asked you whether you thought it would be safe, and said she would be back in about a minute, and asked you to tell her just how soon the

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train started, and said she was going to get her bag at the express office, and asked you if you would look in now and then and see how the baby was getting along, and asked how she should know the car again, and you said it was the smoking-car, and she would know it by that, and ” —

The Brakeman's Voice : “ Yes, ma'am.”

The Woman's Voice : “ Goodness ! Then there ain't a minute to lose ! ”

Campbell : “ The unnatural mother ! What are you going to say to her when she comes in to rob you of your adoptive child ? ”

Mrs. Campbell : “ I shall know what to say. I hope *you* will.”

Campbell : “ I hope Roberts will.”

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IX

THE YOUNG MOTHER, AND THE OTHERS

The Young Mother, at the door, peering down the aisle till she catches sight of the baby, which Campbell has expeditiously transferred to Roberts's knee, and then running toward the group: "Oh, there were so many, was afraid I never should get to the right one. But it *is* the car, and there you are, baby, as bright as a biscuit! Did you think mamma had forgotten her precious? Oh, you darling!" She catches the baby from Campbell, and crushes it to her breast and face; and then turns to Roberts: "I don't know what you'll think of my being gone so

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long, but I have had such a time! First off, I thought I'd telegraph to his folks that we'd got here safe, but I could n't seem to find the right place to send the dispatch to very easy — they live back in the country, a little ways — and then after I got it off, I went to the express office for my bag, and lo! and behold it was n't there, and they said the baggage from the Bangor boat was n't in yet, and I thought I *should* go through the floor; and who should I see but John himself, just about as wild as I was, looking for me and baby; and he's gone back to look after my bag on the boat, and we've concluded to stay till he gets it. He said he'd been all through the cars looking for baby and me, and he could n't find us."

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Campbell: “ He probably did n’t look into the smoking-car.”

The Young Mother: “ Well, there, I guess you ’re right; and I don’t know as I blame him any, for I did n’t intend to get into it myself, and the gentleman here ” — she nods down at Roberts — “ did n’t tell me it was a smoking-car when I left baby with him, and ” —

Campbell: “ Oh, that ’s just his way. He did n’t know it himself.”

The Young Mother: “ Well, he did seem pretty absent-minded, so ’t I did n’t feel exactly right about leaving baby with him, but I had to leave her with somebody, and ” —

Campbell: “ You could n’t have chosen better.”

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The Young Mother : “ I ’m sure I ’m ever so much obliged ” —

Campbell : “ Don’t mention it ; we ’ve all helped — my wife here, and my sister — and we ’ve all taken such a fancy to your baby ” —

Mrs. Roberts : “ Yes, indeed ! Such a *good* little thing ! ”

Mrs. Campbell : “ Perfect little angel ! ”

Campbell : “ We almost hoped you would n’t come back for it, and we were just quarreling about which family it belonged to when you came in.”

The Young Mother : “ Well, I guess when I tell John that he ’ll be ashamed of the way he talked to me about leavin’ it with a perfect stranger. But I see by the gentleman’s looks that it would be

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all right, and so I told John. I hope he did n't think I was never coming back, by the way I stayed."

Campbell: "Not for an instant! He's a brother-in-law of mine, and I took him in hand as soon as I came into the car, and we said we knew you'd be right back, and if you did n't come before the train left we'd get off."

The Young Mother: "Well, I wish you good morning! And if any of you do ever come down Bangor way" —

The Brakeman's Voice, without: "All aboard!"

The Young Mother, vanishing through the door: "Oh, my good gracious, I shall get left, after all!"

Campbell, as the car starts: "Well, Roberts lied us out of that pretty well,

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did n't he?" He puts his arm across Roberts's shoulders. "But he saved the mother's feelings by it; and I shall never think the worse of you for your fibs, old fellow!"

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