

He descended from the carriage, hugging the panier, and ran along the train, vainly looking for his wife. He put the basket down and scrambled up into every carriage to search each compartment. There was no Bertha there.

'Ou est mong femme?' he asked of every official. He was becoming seriously alarmed. Every carriage was emptied of its occupants; the train was evidently not journeying further.

The station master came up and inquired what he wanted. 'Ou est mong femme?' he repeated. The official asked to see his ticket, and Mr. Rathbone produced it.

'Mais—c'est pour Bordeaux. Il vous faut retourner aux Aubrais.'

'But I want my wife—femme—you understand. Where is she?'

'Entrez le wagon, Monsieur—vite—pour Les Aubrais.'

'But I don't see Bertha anywhere?'

Again something was said to him about Les Aubrais.

'Confound it. What do you mean by braying at me so?'

He was thrust into a carriage. His luncheon basket was passed in to him through the window, and in a very few minutes he found himself at the junction where he had missed Bertha.

'Where can she be?' he asked himself, as he descended from the carriage, carrying his luncheon basket. 'She would never dream of going on in the train without me. I wonder whether she will be in one of the waiting rooms?'

But though he sought everywhere, he could not find her.

'What can she have done? She has probably left the train at the next station, and is pacing the platform waiting for me. If I take the next train I am certain to spy her if I keep my eyes open, and then all will be well.'

The next train into which Mr. Rathbone mounted was an omnibus, that drew up at every insignificant station, and put in no pace between them. At none of these did the distressed husband see his wife.

'What the thunder am I to do?' asked he. 'She has undoubtedly gone on; but they will never let her out of a station, for I have got the tickets. Besides, she has not a sou of French money. Poor girl! poor girl! she is in desperate straits, and must be almost off her head with despair.'

Meanwhile Mr. Rathbone became hungry, so he opened the panier and made a good lunch of chicken and ham, a slab of veal, cress, bread and cheese, all washed down with Medoc.

'Precious pet!' sighed the husband. 'How she would have enjoyed this—and she is starving. She has no French money.'

He had hardly completed his repast before the train drew up at Chateauroux, and he became dimly aware that it was likely to remain there for half an hour, whilst the passengers lunched at the buffet.

'I don't understand this Chateauroux,' said Mr. Rathbone. 'It is not down in the programme that Mr. Passenger drew up for us.'

After a long interval the bell rang, the pipe called, and the refreshed travellers swarmed out of the restaurant and resumed their places in the carriage. The train went on, and finally, when it was dark, Mr. Rathbone was deposited at Limoges.

'Limoges,' said he; 'I don't remember anything about the place. I am sure it's not down on Passenger's paper. I ought to be at Bordeaux now, and here I am at this other place.'

He got out his railway map, and with some difficulty discovered where he was. Instead of going the direct way, by Tours, he had taken that somewhat less direct by Limoges.

'Great Scott!' exclaimed he; 'no wonder that I have missed Bertha. She has gone by one route, and I by the other. Well, we shall meet in Bordeaux. She cannot get lost, as I have the tickets, and she will not be allowed to leave the station till I arrive and produce them.'

Mr. Rathbone found that it was not possible for him to proceed on his journey that night. Some difficulty was experienced with the ticket collector, but he was finally suffered to pass into the town, and went to a good hotel, where he dined well and was given a comfortable bed, with a bouillotte, or hot-water bottle, in it.

'And Bertha is walking the platform all night,' he sighed; 'and on an empty stomach, too. She has had nothing to eat since the morning, and then only a hard roll washed down with coffee. Really, I have had quite a nice little dinner—soup, fish, tough mutton, chicken, caramel pudding, cheese, and dessert. I'll

have a cup of coffee and tumble into bed. Poor—poor—poor Bertha.'

He slept very soundly. He was tired, and the strain of his nerve had been almost more than the man could bear, so that it was well for him that nature came to his aid and gave him refreshing slumbers.

Next morning he rose, had his cafe-au-lait, bread and butter, and started from Limoges for Bordeaux, via Perigeux.

'I see clearly how Bertha travelled,' said he as he traced the route on the map. 'She went to Tours, then to Poitiers, where a great battle was fought by the Black Prince, then to Angouleme, and so to Bordeaux. She will have reached that place before now. I should think she will hardly be alive, with having had no bed to sleep in and no food for forty-eight hours. I must get myself another luncheon basket today, as I do not reach Bordeaux till late.'

When at length he did arrive at his destination he hunted the platforms, the waiting-rooms, the buffets, but could not see Bertha.

'This is a pretty go!' exclaimed he. 'I see it all as clear as daylight now. She got out of the train at Tours, and remained there, looking at every train as it arrived, expecting to see my face at a carriage window and to hear my joyous cry on beholding her. Well, if she be not here, at all events the trunks are, for I have the ticket for the luggage. It will be something to obtain a change of linen, a clean collar, and a shave. I feel disgustingly dirty.'

It was as he surmised. The luggage had arrived and was en depot. He took it out and had it mounted on the omnibus of the Hote, des Deux Pigeons.

'Of course,' said he, 'the poor darling, if she had come here, could never have got at the boxes, not having the ticket. Well, I'll have a change and make myself comfortable, eat my dinner, and consider the whole situation.'

On reaching his inn his own trunk was carried up to the chamber allotted to him. That of his wife he left below. Then he unlocked his trunk. On the top lay his mandolin. Mr. Rathbone had a pleasant baritone voice, but uncultivated. He was wont to sing at evening parties after dinner, and to amuse himself when his day's work was done. He had brought the instrument with him, with which he was accustomed to accompany himself. He had thought how soothing and yet refreshing it might prove to Bertha to have him sing and play to her in the evening, even during the day at Biarritz, sitting on the rocks and looking out over the sea.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Rathbone had been whisked away in the express from Les Aubrais, in the direction of Tours. She had been seriously alarmed when left alone in the carriage, and at each station she appealed to the guard: 'J'ai perdu ma mari!'

But she resolved to sit tight till she reached Bordeaux. Occasionally she was asked for her billet, and then she would reply: 'J'ai perdu Monsieur Rathbone, ma mari.' To herself she said, 'Really, these French are very familiar, or they would not speak of my dear William as my "Billy." But it all comes of their Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. It is astonishing to me that with this profession of equality they still have first, second, and third class carriages. It is against their principles and professions.'

At Tours Mrs. Rathbone was so hungry that she went to the refreshment rooms, and, discovering that the train tarried to allow the passengers to have a meal, sat down to a three-franc dejeuner of oysters, omelette, two meats, and dessert, all washed down with half a bottle of light wine. She had not French money, she intimated by signs and broken words to the waiter, and must pay him in English shillings, and he was content to receive three such in place of three francs, and a sixpence for himself.

Then she resumed her place in the train and travelled on to Bordeaux, which she reached that same evening.

There some difficulty arose to her having no ticket; but she explained 'J'ai perdu ma mari'; and after much discussion among the officials, one was detailed to convey her to the British Consulate, where the Consul and his wife received her with much kindness. He took her to a suitable hotel, and undertook to wire up the line to inquire after the strayed and lost husband of the name of Rathbone.

Nothing, however, could be heard of him at any station short of Les Aubrais; and thence came the reply that an Englishman had been seen there running about with a panier under his arm, but that he was gone, and the station-master could not say by what train or whither, but he thought he was in Orleans.

Happily Bertha had sufficient articles of toilet in her handbag, from which she had not been parted, to make her comfortable for the night. Mr. Passenger had enjoined on her to take soap, because it is an