

**GOLDEN STORIES: A
SELECTION OF THE
BEST FICTION BY
THE FOREMOST WRITERS**

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Golden Stories: A Selection of the Best Fiction by the Foremost Writers by Various

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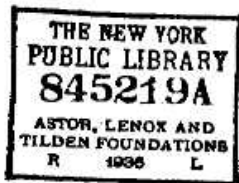


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Selected Nov 23 Nov 1921



CONCORD OF SWEET SOUNDS

A Musical Tale

By JAMES BARR *

TO a lone traveler the journey by express from New York to Montreal is given to be dreary. To five Englishmen, traveling together, the journey is not quite so monotonous, but quite monotonous enough. This afternoon, by the time the train had accomplished three-quarters of its run, five English passengers had grown weary of their first real train ride in America, weary of the unkempt scenery, weary of the jostling, the jolting, the bumping, weary of the clatter and dust and smoke, weary of books and pipes and papers. At length, to chase away monotony, four of the five Englishmen, revolving their chairs so that they faced one another, then began in unison to sing. They struck up the Madrigal from "The Mikado," surely one of the most delightful of Gilbert and Sullivan's inspirations.

At the first note each passenger in the car laid aside whatever he or she was doing the better to listen. For the four Englishmen sang with surpassing beauty of voices gifted by nature and perfected by training. Every soul within hearing distance was charmed, many shifted seats to be near the singers. Every soul was thankful for that harmonious intermission in the dull discord of the journey—every soul save one soul.

Aboard this express there happened to be one man who had no music in his soul and, as it further happened, he was a man of mighty importance. Besides having no music in his soul, the conductor of the train had a sore head, having, at the last stopping-place, met with a rebuff in a verbal

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CONCORD OF SWEET SOUNDS

encounter with the station-master, a rebuff that had ruffled his easily ruffled dignity, for the American conductor is a man of more than ordinary dignity. And at the very moment the four Englishmen got into the full swing of the Madrigal the conductor entered the car.

A moment he stood flabbergasted by the insufferable impertinence of a knot of mere passengers daring to brake the muffled drumming of his hurtling express; then, recovering his composure, he stately made his way along the aisle till he confronted the offending four. For two full seconds he contemplated the Englishmen much as though they were zoological specimens, then he spoke:

"Flag the racket!" he commanded sternly. "This is a passenger-car, not a bar-room."

It was now the singers' turn to be flabbergasted. To be spoken to in this manner by a paid official in attendance on a train was an experience so new as to be offensive. Instantly the four ceased to sing, but, slow to speak, made no reply, nor did they so much as glance at the conductor, M'Laughlan. However, the fifth Englishman, who had taken no part in making things melodious, quietly asked:

"Why should these gentlemen not sing?"

"Because I say they're not to, that's why!" replied McLaughlan, lordly as Bonaparte might have addressed a mere king.

Undismayed the questioner still questioned.

"Does their singing annoy any passenger?" he asked.

"I am not taking a plebiscite of the passengers on these men's vocal abilities. I say 'stop,' and what I say goes aboard this car."

Having published this edict M'Laughlan turned on his heel and began to paw his way along the swinging car. He had taken no more than four steps when his course was arrested by four clear voices striking into the Madrigal at the very note his command had caused them to cease. Never before had his authority been so flagrantly flouted. Quick as a flash he again stood before the four, and he hooked his

CONCORD OF SWEET SOUNDS

left hand over the strap that communicated with the engine-driver. The singers ceased.

"This time stay stopped," barked M'Laughlan angrily. "Stay stopped or you 'll mighty soon find yourselves sidetracked in the swamp."

"But, Mr. Conductor," protested the talkative fifth, "these gentlemen have paid for accommodation, transport, and freedom. You are merely the servant of their servant, the railway company; and, believe me, gentlemen are not accustomed to be dictated to by a servant."

The fifth gentleman thought he was reasoning; the conductor knew him to be only insolent.

"The next time these gentlemen open their yaps out they go, and you with them —"

"Ding dong! Ding dong!" rang out the clear voice of Mitton, and the other three joined in with "Yet until the shadows fall!"

The conductor gave the communication strap such a mighty jerk as to come within an ace of uprooting the signal-bell, and in response to the resulting clang the airbrakes brought the train to a ponderous stop. Before the wheels ceased to turn the Englishmen were on their feet and had moved toward the door where a brakesman stood grinning. The brakesman had never before seen such a docile eviction from an express.

"I 'll be glad to stretch my legs," said Wentworth in a friendly way to the genial brakesman.

"You 'll find a continent at your service," replied the brakesman, waving his hand toward the swampy woods that banked against the rail fence.

When Wentworth's eyes beheld the wilderness he raised his voice and warbled:

"Shepherd have you seen
My Flora pass this way?"

The passengers, who had taken great interest in the late proceedings without committing themselves to one side or