



Stories for the Train

Tales on the go

0:10:00

A funny thing happened to me after the train journey

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My bicycle was in its usual place. Thank goodness, otherwise how could I get back home again at that time of night! The train had been late, very late. What was it the nasal sounding guard had said over the passenger information service! “Sorry about the delay, some stupid idiot has jumped on to the track from the bridge near Axford. We need to wait for a replacement driver.”

That was two hours before and we had all spent that time looking at each other; doing crosswords in our newspapers; or, playing games on mobile phones or iPads. I was reading about the World War II ARP’s in a book I had loaned from the Library. The sign on the wall of the train carriage said that we were in a “QUIET ZONE.” You wouldn’t have thought so, with everyone ringing home to explain what was happening. It seemed that everyone nowadays carries a mobile phone on them for just such an emergency.

It was near midnight in Wallbridge as we alighted from the train. Everyone bustled out of the station, through the one open gate, into waiting cars, driven no doubt by a loved one. I was the last person on the platform, having dropped one of my bicycle clips, more than once, in my hurry to get on the road.

The station porter, or whoever it was, hadn't seen me and to my horror when I tried the gate, it was locked. I shook the gate but it wouldn't budge. Locked in! My brain started to panic about what I could do. My first thought had been to climb the gate of course, but I hadn't worked out how to get the bicycle over. I looked around the station platform and cursed that the Station Manager was such a tidy devil, leaving nothing to stand on. To make matters worse, suddenly all the overhead lights around the area went off and I was left in the pitch black that matched my mood. I reached into my jacket pocket and retrieved my mobile phone. It has a torch device in it, so I turned it on. Better, but not perfect. Here was I, dressed in a business suit, pushing around a bicycle, with nowhere to go.

My temper was really up by then, and I was about to explode, realising there was only one thing for it. I put away my phone and with superhuman strength I lifted my bicycle above my head and balanced it half way across the top of the gate, a wheel either side. Despite being in a suit I managed to climb up and join the bicycle at the top of the gate. I sat there a moment getting my breath back when I noticed a policeman standing near the gate.

“Ello, ello, ello, what's going on 'ere?” he bellowed. To cut a long story short, he helped me down and asked me what I was up to at that time of night. I told him someone had locked the gate before I had retrieved my bicycle. The policeman appeared to reluctantly accept my explanation. He seemed most inquisitive about my bicycle, telling me he had never see one like it before. It was weird, there were no street lights lit anywhere in the area, and I thought that he couldn't have had a decent look at it. I clocked that his uniform had looked out of place, but I put it down as old fashioned

being in the country and not quite up to the style of London Bobbies I was more used to.

I wheeled my bicycle across the road, past the darkened windows of the Station Hotel, mounted my bicycle, turned on my lights and set off down Alma Road. I heard muffled shouting behind me, but I took no notice. All I wanted to do was reach home and go to bed. There were no cars on the road that time of night, so it was eerie cycling in the pitch black, almost like cycling through woods. It was difficult getting my bearings in the dark but I worked out I should have been passing Memorial Gardens, the site of the old ammunition factory, but it couldn't have been as there was a huge brick building on my left. I thought maybe I had taken a wrong turning somewhere when unexpectedly there was one hell of a noise, sounding like either an old factory or air raid siren. I said to myself that it was obviously a safety measure resulting from the loss of power to the area. I stood with my hands over my ears waiting for it to stop.

Through my fingers I heard the drone of an aircraft overhead. A little low for that time of night was my thinking. I looked up, but it was a cloudy night and I couldn't see the twinkling lights of its wing tips, so guessed it must be above the clouds. The siren cut out and as I took my hands down from my ears I could clearly hear the plane above and strange whistling noises transcending the air above. The whistling stopped and I thought it best I carry on and find a street sign to say where I was,

Suddenly there was a huge explosion behind me and everywhere lit up. I was knocked off my bicycle and landed in a heap on the other side of the road, wrapped up in the pedals and wheels of the bicycle. I was dazed but could see figures running about, shouting and throwing buckets of water over a raging fire that had

resulted from the first big explosion. The building was blazing and I could hear additional bangs emanating from behind the walls as the fire took hold. I saw a man in a tin helmet rushing around, directing the people with buckets where to throw the water. I wondered where the fire engine was.

A woman, with curlers in her hair and dressed in an old housecoat came over to me and asked if I was alright. I don't know why, but I couldn't speak. She knelt down beside me and looked me in the eyes. "Has anyone got any bandages? This guy over here looks concussed," I heard her shout.

A man in a tweed jacket carrying an old fashioned valise appeared out of the bright light of the fire and advised the woman that he was a doctor. "You'll be alright sir. I'm a doctor. Let me have a look at you", he directed at me. "Can you move?" I couldn't, and I was still devoid of the power of speech. He reached into his bag and poured some liquid out of a bottle onto some cloth he had produced. "This might hurt," he advised me. He wiped my forehead, and he was right. It hurt like blazes, but still no sound came from me, but I remember closing my eyes with the shock.

When I opened them again, I saw a long red vehicle pulling up and firemen jumping out to help put out the inferno. I kept thinking to myself that for some reason or other the local fire engine must have been out on another emergency and they had pulled this one out of someone's private vintage car collection, to plug the gap.

The doctor shone his torch in my eyes, which stung a bit, then proceeded to bandage my head. I wanted to talk to him, but I couldn't. It was a strange feeling watching and hearing people all around and not being able to interact. But that is exactly how it was. The doctor called for someone to fetch a stretcher and find a house

with a telephone to call for an ambulance. I wondered why he just didn't get on his mobile phone and make the call himself, unless he had rushed out too quickly and left it at home.

There was now bedlam around the building. The firemen were projecting huge gushes of water from the hoses and I could see, from where I was lying, a massive hole in the front wall and the roof above. The man in the tin hat was flapping up and down shouting orders, but no one took any notice of him, he was only adding to the confusion.

The woman who had initially found me appeared again, this time with a mug in her hand. "Is it okay if I give him a cuppa tea Doctor?" she asked.

The doctor sat me up and advised this lady to only give me sips. My mouth was as dry as a bone, so this sounded a good idea to me. Good idea maybe, but my mouth wouldn't open and it went all down my chin. Some tea did get threw my lips though. Ugh! I hadn't been able to tell her I didn't take sugar.

I couldn't work out quite what was going on. What had happened? Why had the building, that shouldn't have been there, exploded as I rode by? I heard bells clanging as a vehicle pulled up near me. It was an ambulance. I thought I must be going mad, this time it appeared that they had commandeered an old ambulance from a museum or a vintage rally.

Two ambulance men appeared and having spoken with the doctor carefully lifted me on to a stretcher. I tried to speak to them. I wanted to know which hospital they were taking me to. No-one had searched me to see if I had a mobile phone on me to find out

someone I knew, to let them know what had happened to me. This was strange. Again I felt it was so wrong.

I was lifted into the ambulance on the stretcher, which was then strapped down onto a fixed bed. The doctor came in and told me that all would be okay once I got to the hospital. I wanted to scream “Which hospital?”, but nothing came out. He climbed out of the back of the ambulance and one of the crew clambered in, turned on an internal light then closed the doors and sat down opposite me. I heard the ambulance start up and we moved off, bells peeling again in the night as we left the burning building to the ancient fire engine.

The ambulance man reached over me and pulled out a newspaper that had been shoved into a compartment on the side of the van. “Don’t mind me”, he said “there’s not much I can do for you until we get to the hospital.” He opened up the newspaper really wide. It was a big newspaper, so it wasn’t the Metro I decided. It said it was the Daily Express. I could see clearly the headlines. “BLITZ BOMBING OF LONDON GOES ON ALL NIGHT.” Everything then went black.

I awoke in a hospital bed. A doctor was standing over me. “You had us worried. You’ve been concussed for the last two hours. It appears you had a nasty bump on the head when the train you were travelling in suddenly pulled up sharp.”

“That can’t be” I declared. “I was blown off my bicycle when a building blew up.”

I’m sure that’s what happened.