

Mistaken identity (by Mark Twain)

Years ago I arrived one day at Salamanca, New York, where I was to change trains and take the sleeper. There were crowds of people on the platform, and they were all trying to get into the long sleeper train which was already packed. I asked the young man in the booking-office if I could have a sleeping-berth and he answered: "No." I went off and asked another local official if I could have some poor little corner somewhere in a sleeping-car, but he interrupted me angrily saying, "No, you can't, every corner is full. Now, don't bother me anymore," and he turned his back and walked off. I felt so hurt that I said to my companion, "If these people knew who I was, they..."¹ But my companion stopped me there,— "Don't talk such nonsense, we'll have to put up with this," he said, "If they knew who you were, do you think it would help you to get a vacant seat in a train which has no vacant seats in it?" This did not improve my condition at all, but just then I noticed that the porter of a sleeping-car had his eye on me. I saw the expression of his face suddenly change. He whispered to the uniformed conductor, pointing to me, and I realized I was being talked about. Then the conductor came forward, his face all politeness.

"Can I be of any service to you?" he asked. "Do you want a place in a sleeping-car?"

"Yes," I said, "I'll be grateful to you if you can give me a place, anything will do."

"We have nothing left except the big family compartment," he continued, "with two berths and a couple of armchairs in it, but it is entirely at your disposal. Here, Tom, take these suitcases aboard!"

Then he touched his hat, and we moved along.³ I was eager to say a few words to my companion, but I changed my mind. The porter made us comfortable in the compartment, and then said, with many bows and smiles:

"Now, is there anything you want, sir? Because you can have just anything you want."

"Can I have some hot water?" I asked.

"Yes, sir, I'll get it myself."

"Good! Now, that lamp is hung too high above the berth. Can I have a better lamp fixed just at the head of my bed below the luggage rack, so that I can read comfortably?"

"Yes, sir. The lamp you want is just being fixed in the next compartment. I'll get it from there and fix it here. It'll burn all night. Yes, sir, you can ask for anything you want, the whole railroad will be turned inside out to please you." And he disappeared.

I smiled at my companion, and said:

"Well, what do you say now? Didn't their attitude change the moment they understood I was Mark Twain? You see the result, don't you?" My companion did not answer. So I added, "Don't you like the way you are being served? And all for the same fare."

As I was saying this, the porter's smiling face appeared in the doorway and this speech followed:

"Oh, sir, I recognized you the minute I set my eyes on you. I told the conductor so."

"Is that so, my boy?" I said handing him a good tip. "Who am I?"

"Mr McClellan, Mayor of New York", he said and disappeared again.

Find English equivalents to the following Russian phrases.

- 1) много лет назад
- 2) сесть в спальный вагон
- 3) можно мне получить спальное место?
- 4) не надоедайте мне больше
- 5) и ушёл прочь
- 6) не могу ли я чем-нибудь помочь вам?
- 7) у нас ничего не осталось
- 8) он устроил нас в купе
- 9) вам нужно что-нибудь?
- 10) не принесёте ли вы мне горячей воды?
- 11) я возьму (лампу) оттуда
- 12) вы можете попросить всё, что хотите
- 13) а что вы теперь скажете?
- 14) как только они узнали
- 15) Всё по одинаковой цене
- 16) в дверях
- 17) правда?

True or false? Correct the statements which do not correspond to the contents of the text.

- 1) Several years ago Mark Twain arrived in Washington where he was to change buses. True False
- 2) At the railway station there were many people trying to get into the train. True False
- 3) Mark Twain bought the ticket in the booking office. True False
- 4) There were many vacant seats in the train. True False
- 5) When Mark Twain turned to the official at the railway station, the latter was very polite to him and said he was ready to do anything for the writer and his companion. True False
- 6) Mark Twain was very disappointed when nobody recognized him. True False
- 7) The conductor gave Mark Twain a poor little corner in a sleeper which was already overcrowded. True False
- 8) The conductor's name was Tom. True False
- 9) There were four berths and two chairs in the compartment. True False
- 10) Mark Twain asked the porter to repair the berth. True False
- 11) The porter tried to please Mark Twain because he thought him to be Mayor of New York. True False

Answer the following questions.

- 1) What was Mark Twain to do in New York?
- 2) What were people doing on the platform?
- 3) Who did Mark Twain speak to about getting a place in the train?
- 4) Why was Mark Twain hurt by the official's answer?
- 5) What did Mark Twain's companion said that didn't improve the writer's mood?
- 6) What did Mark Twain notice then?
- 7) What did the conductor say to Mark Twain?
- 8) What kind of compartment did the conductor put at Mark Twain's disposal?
- 9) What did the conductor tell Tom to do with the gentlemen's suitcases?

- 10) What did Mark Twain say about the conductor's and the porter's attitude to them?
- 11) Did Mark Twain's companion like the way they were being served?
- 12) Was the conductor's attitude to Mark Twain the result of his respect to the writer?