



The Victorians

Victorian railways - Iron horses

Written by Andrew Chater

- BETTY: Nancy – that bread and them scones - and take them to the parlour – we’ve got a visitor.
- NANCY: We weren’t expecting no-one.
- BETTY: No – and from the master’s face neither was he. Quickly now, girl.
- ALFRED: Who is it?
- BETTY: You won’t believe it. Back here after all these years – and dressed in a fancy frock coat!
- ALFRED: Who?
- BETTY: And Nancy, girl – you keep your ears open – I want to hear every word!
- NANCY: Alright...
- ALFRED: Well, go on, then. Who is it?
- BETTY: D’you remember, once, many years ago, a young scamp, a coal boy that came to the farm to pay court to Miss Elizabeth?
- ALFRED: Young Georgie Stephenson his name was – I remember him well.





- BETTY: Well guess who's in the parlour right now, asking for Miss Elizabeth's hand? Older, wiser, considerably richer.
- ALFRED: You're joking.
- BETTY: I'm not! And he's not young Georgie Stephenson the coal boy any more – he's Mr George Stephenson, engineer; Mr George Stephenson, inventor; Mr George Stephenson, the 'father of the locomotive'. Oh, aye, there's nothing I don't know about Mr George Stephenson.
- ALFRED: And how's that then?
- BETTY: Because all this time Miss Elizabeth's been waiting. And she's kept this keep-sake book under her bed...
- ALFRED: Which you've just happened to glance in...!
- BETTY: Which I've just happened to glance in. And everything she's heard, over the years, she's written it down. How he married and how this wife died. And how he became such a clever engineer. How there's not a machine made he can't take to pieces and put back together again, improved. And all the while he's inventing. Lamps that work underwater. Iron horses.
- ALFRED: 'Iron horses'?
- BETTY: That's what it said. At Hetton Colliery there's a tramway eight miles long and the coal is dragged from the pit to the river along the rails by iron horses. They eat coal, it's said; and they pull gigantic weights– thirty tonnes, forty tonnes. And not a pit pony in sight.





- ALFRED: I tell you there's something devilish about this. Something unnatural.
- BETTY: And Miss Elizabeth has written in her keep-sake book, that these iron horses, they are the future. How this world of the farm is the old world. In the world to come, iron horses will take the place of animals.
- ALFRED: No!
- BETTY: It's true. With wheels where there should be legs.
- ALFRED: No!
- BETTY: And they'll be pulling not coal, but people, from town to town and city to city!
- ALFRED: No!
- BETTY: And her Mr Stephenson will be rich!
- ALFRED: I tell ye', he's the devil, or made some pact with him! Poor, wee Georgie Stephenson. What some young men will do to rise above their station!
- BETTY: Ah, Nancy! Now, sit down, girl, and tell us what they said.
- NANCY: I can't sit down. The master calls for wine and glasses – to toast the future!
- BETTY: The future! I told you so!
- ALFRED: Devilish mechanicals!
- NANCY: I'm sorry?





ALFRED:

Iron-clad oxen and horses eating coal!

NANCY:

Is he alright?

ALFRED:

Men and women dragged behind fierce metal
beasties! And they'd toast this future, would
they?

BETTY:

Here, Nancy, give us some of that wine. Now
drain a glass, you daft old thing, and smile – for
Miss Elizabeth, at last, is to wed!

