Well, goodbye. I hope nothing will happen to you and that you will have a fine trip.” With that, I was left to my own devices.

I didn’t expect anything to happen to me because, even if this was my first solo overnight trip, I was quite old enough to be responsible for my actions. The idea of going down alone was not at all unpleasant to me, it gave me a sense of proprietorship over my soul which I seldom if ever feel. In short, I felt like a time-mellowed woman of the world.

When I at last succeeded in bumping and slithering by passengers who were going in the opposite direction, I reached the dining car. I caught the steward’s eye; he held up one finger questioningly, so I held up an answering finger affirmatively. He beckoned to me and smiling a stewardly smile, he pulled out the one vacant chair at a table for four. I glanced at the other occupants of the table.

“Now, won’t Mamma’s darling eat a iddy bit of spinach?”
Mamma’s darling, “Wow!”
Gran’ma: “Yes, baby, I’ll give you a shiny new penny — ”

Thinking that perhaps they might force me also to eat spinach, I smiled an innocent smile at the steward and slid into an empty chair at a table for two pretending I thought this was the chair he meant. Then I knew that the steward’s smile was only skin deep, but I didn’t mind.

As I was trying to economize on dinner I chose a “salad bowl.” “So,” I said to myself as they brought the delectable concoction in a bowl as big as a bathtub, “they must have known I was hungry.” Then I took just a dainty portion on my plate, expecting to have a second helping later. But as soon as I had helped myself, the waiter swooped down and grabbed his precious bowl. I couldn’t protest because that would prove my verdant inexperience; I had to content myself with a complacent, worldly smile.

The dinner, to my satisfaction, was but a dollar, so I pompously gave the waiter a five-dollar bill. I had nothing between a nickel and a half dollar for change in my purse, so I fervently hoped that he would bring some. Oh, the irony of fate! The waiter smilingly brought back the plate with only dollars and half dollars on it. I had been carefully instructed to give a tip of at least ten percent of the check. What was I to do? It would disgrace the family if I asked for change, so I gracefully left fifty cents on the plate. My Scotch ancestry shrieked a protest: my pocketbook looked dismayed, but my pride and the waiter said, “Thank you, Madam.”

I was lulled to sleep by a chorus of manly snores and the drone of an insurance agent’s voice assuring the victim of the necessity of his wares.

I hope and I think that I kept up my worldly-wise aspect until the bitter end: I don’t think anyone noticed that I missed a step and almost fell off the train, or that my suitcase accidentally opened at the station. If the porter observed it he seemed unconcerned. I guess porters are used to such things and anyway, I had just slipped him the fruit of his labors.

—Julia McWilliams, Class 11

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