

MURDER'S STORY.

**Why He Gave Up His
Lonesome Vocation.**

commercial traveler; that is, I was once. Circumstances over which I had no control prompted me to seek another method of livelihood; this, combined with my wife's wishes, which of course I am bound to respect, as every married man ought where it doesn't conflict too much with his own natural desires and sentiments.

I don't know as I can blame her for thus desiring a change in my then occupation, as few women would like to be tied for life to a raving maniac, or one who possessed physical peculiarities in the shape of hair which is bound to stand on end like "quills upon the fretful porcupine." And either of these results would have been obtained, I'm sure, had I ever run the risk of passing through a similar experience to the one I am about to relate.

It was quite a number of years ago that the incidents I am about to relate happened, yet so vividly were the facts impressed upon my mind that it seems but yesterday.

The firm with whom I was employed, in one of the large eastern cities, desired me to make a change and travel in a western circuit, drumming up trade as I went along. A wild, lawless element at that time prevailed in the west, and it was almost as much as a man's life was worth to go there under respectable pretenses, unless well equipped with firearms.

My wife tried to prevail upon me not to go, but that was one of the instances where my own natural inclinations led me to disrespect her wishes, as she has often since informed me.

But I would not confess to being chicken-hearted, so making careful preparations, and kissing my wife a fond good-by, I soon found myself on route.

The journey was without special incident. I enjoyed the trip immensely, the scenery being entirely strange and everything altogether novel. Stopping at a few minor towns during the latter part of my trip, I eventually found myself in the vicinity of Leadville. Having heard so much about the peculiar lawlessness of this town, I determined to take a bird's eye view of it, even if I did not transact any business.

I did not believe the element predominating there would be especially interested in eastern dry goods, but I was bound to see the town at any cost, if only to convince my wife that I was not a man easily trifled with, or afraid of any danger.

To give a description of the place and its inhabitants during my brief ride through it until I reached the hotel I was destined to stop at would be impossible; it surpassed my wildest expectations.

The driver of my conveyance landed me at various hotels, which were too full for another occupant, until I saw the hour was drawing near midnight, and determined to make a halt somewhere. At last the driver drew up before a dilapidated looking tavern signed the "Golden Eagle."

After a brief survey of the exterior I sent the driver in to investigate the interior; he soon returned, followed by a heavy thickset man with a gleam of latent humor in his eye, who said he was sorry, but the house was full. Noticing my disappointment, he finally asked:

"Have you any objections to a bed-fellow?"

"If there is no help for it I suppose I must," I replied, "though far from agreeable." Mentally I heaped anathemas on myself for my reckless venture.

"Your bedfellow is a quiet fellow, when he is asleep, although I must say he is rather violent when annoyed. He sleeps very soundly, and all you have to do is to be careful not to wake him. He has been in bed some time."

Now I might as well make a confession. I am not a brave man, humilitating as it is to say it. My wife knows this. I have often tried to convince myself that I am, but truth compels me to say I am an awful coward.

The landlord's description of my bedfellow was anything but assuring, and I was on the point of declining, when the landlord, evidently reading what was transpiring in my mind, exclaimed: "You are afraid, are you?"

"Afraid? I should think not, indeed," I returned, for I was too much of a coward to brave being thought one. "I accept your offer of half a bed. Bring me some brandy and water and a cigar."

I sat down at one of the little tables in the bar-room and puffed away at my cigar. I tried to persuade myself that I was very jolly; it was a feeble attempt, however.

The landlord finally made his appearance, and with the aid of a tallow candle escorted me up a narrow, rickety old staircase. The room he ushered me into was comparatively clean, but low ceilinged with poor furniture.

He placed his hand between the candle and the bed as if to shield the occupant from the light; setting it down upon an old stand he said, or whispered:

"Be sure and don't take the light near him; nothing wakes him sooner than that. You see I don't know how he might like my putting another man with him, and he's a very ugly customer when he is riled."

This was very reassuring. "I shall be very careful," I replied.

"All right. Good night."

He had no sooner left the room than I cautiously sat down, taking care not to make the least noise. I calmly surveyed my position. According to the landlord, my companion was of anything but an amiable disposition. If I should chance to awaken him I knew not what might occur. He might assault me dangerously before I could explain. I half resolved to pass the night in a chair, but it was such a high-backed altogether uncomfortable chair, that I soon got discouraged.

I glanced toward the bed. One consolation, my companion seemed to be in a deep sleep, for he did not even

move. I could see the ridge made by his feet at the end of the bed, and that was all. The bed was a very wide one. The man who had possession of it lay near the wall, and there was plenty of space between him and the outside without touching him at all.

I screwed my courage up, and began to undress. Before finishing, however, I determined to make an experiment to see whether he slept soundly or not. I had left the bedroom door open, so I could make a run for it if necessary. I fixed my eyes on the bed as I let my boot fall.

The man, whose clothes, by the way, lay on a chain at the foot of the bed, from the quality of which I imagined he was a miner, never made the slightest motion. He was evidently a sound sleeper. This decided me, and hastily finishing undressing, I crept into bed.

Of course I was careful not to touch my companion. I do not know how long I lay awake, but the novelty of the situation drove sleep from my eyes for some time. Gradually, however, Morpheus gained the ascendancy, and being reassured that my bedfellow slept profoundly, I soon followed his example.

I have no idea how long I slept before I commenced to dream. I suddenly thought that my companion woke up and sat upright in bed; that he glared around, and suddenly his eyes fell on me. He then uttered a terrible cry and threw himself upon me. In spite of my natural cowardice, I saw that if I did not struggle I should be killed. I thought I seized him by the throat, and tightening my grasp, I saw him getting black in the face. His hand fell powerless by his side, a smothered groan escaped him; but still I pressed his throat, tighter and tighter—his face grew blacker and blacker.

In an agony of fear I awoke, and what was my horror and dismay to find that my hand was really pressing my companion's throat! He did not move nor stir, and his body felt as cold as ice. "Great God!" I exclaimed aloud, "can he be dead?"

I jumped out of bed. The candle which I had left burning was not quite extinguished. Seizing it in my hand, I rushed toward the bed, and let its rays fall full upon the man's face. My worst fears were realized. He was dead, black in the face—I had strangled him in my sleep!

I shall not attempt to describe my sensations at this horrible spectacle. My body was bathed in a cold perspiration, my hands trembled and for a few moments I believe I was bereft of my senses. I recovered by degrees—but it was only to realize in a more acute degree my situation.

There lay my victim, and I was a murderer! My trial, conviction, and the hideous gallows all passed before me! Who would believe me? I sat down, buried my face in my hands and sobbed like a child. My wife, my own comfortable home, should I ever see them again?

What was to be done? Should I arouse the house and make a clean breast of it? But what could I say? Tell them I had killed a man in my sleep? Not a soul would believe the story. Could I effect my escape? Impossible; knowing the town I was in and the nature of its inhabitants, I could not even hope for a trial. Good God, I could see it all; the wild mob, the hastily erected gallows, or perchance, a rope hung over the branch of a tree, to hang by the neck until dead. Hanged by the neck! Yes, that would be my fate. As this terrible thought crossed my mind, I cast my eyes around the chamber, they fell upon a beam with hooks in it; from thence they wandered to the man's clothes on the top of which lay—evidently his—a large bandanna handkerchief.

A sudden inspiration seized me; a means of safety suggested itself to my mind. Suppose I could make it appear that the man had committed suicide. Yes, that was my only chance, and I determined to execute it. I took the dead man's handkerchief, and advanced to the corpse, with an awful repugnance, however. My hands trembled so I could scarcely adjust the noose, but finally succeeded, putting one end around the man's neck. I stood on a chair and fastened the other end of the handkerchief to a hook in the beam; letting go of the body it swung to and fro, into space.

I jumped into bed and, closing my eyes, shut out the horrible sight; by this time it was broad daylight. As I lay, quaking with fear, I heard the steps of two men on the stairs. They seemed to be carrying something heavy between them. The long anticipated moment had arrived. In a few seconds they would discover the body. Would the ruse succeed with them? If so I might hope to deceive others.

The door opened and two men entered the room, placing something heavy on the floor. I never stirred.

"Well, I'm blessed if this ere man ain't gone and hanged himself again," said a voice which I recognized as the landlord's.

"By golly, that's true!" said the other man. "No, I see how it is; the stranger found out the trick you played on him, and, not liking the idea of sleeping with a corpse, he tucked him up there to get rid of him."

"You're right," replied the landlord. "He's a cool 'un, anyway; and, would you believe it, last night I took him for a coward. That shows how easy it is to be mistaken in people."

Well, to make a long story short, the man, so I found out afterward, was a miner who, coming into town, had gambled away all his money, and in despair had hung himself in the chamber the night before.

When I went down to breakfast everyone knew the joke and I was looked upon as a tenderfoot with lots of sand. I soon returned home and told the adventure to my friends, but not as I have told it to you, dear readers, but with the same construction that the landlord of the Golden Eagle put upon it. However, my wife guessed at the truth. I have never traveled as a commercial man since.—E. J. Sargent, in Yankee Blade.

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