

THE MULE-SHOE CURVE.

As long as the railroad, for over 100 miles of its course, meekly traversed the valleys at the foot of the range, the great mountains, seemingly secure in their height and majesty, regarded it with seeming indifference.

Just before the daily passenger train is due from the north, there issues from the engine-house a large and powerful locomotive, expressly designed for the heavy grades ahead.

On a certain beautiful September afternoon, not long ago it was in its place, giving signs of life in the shape of occasional threads of smoke from the stack, and little puffs of white steam.

It was a little dull at times in the "new town," and, if one had no liking for drinking and gambling, he might find the evenings long. Should he stroll, however, along the adobe buildings of the older settlement, he might detect signs of a certain sociability.

Between the average Mexican who dwells under the American flag and the average American pioneer, there is apt to be but little affection. There was not a male inhabitant of the "old town" whom Tom Lewis regarded with the slightest complacency; but it was quite different with little Mariquita, whom he met at Alamosa on Christmas Day.

"Wa'l, Tom," said the roadmaster, "I allow yer'd better be mighty keery. I ain't a sayin' the little gal ain't poofy, an' good, too; but them greasers is a queer lot. I seen that feller Jose looking mighty black when you was a-dancin' with Mariquita the other night, an' he's part of that mean cuss Carlos that you fired out of the engine house the other day."

"I'll try to take keer of myself, but Mariquita's a daisy little gal, ez you say, an' ez long ez she's willin', you bet I'll dance with her in spite of all the greasers from here down to Sonora. Hello! there's the train." Ten minutes later he was on his engine, and had begun the ascent of the grade.

It was anything but dull at Manitou, at the foot of Pike's peak, that season. People had come from all parts of the country, and, if the "society reporters" were to be believed, there were more pretty girls there than ever before.

Had she smiled? Ah! no one knew. When they came down from Pike's peak together, a certain gilded youth offered odds, in the billiard room, that they were engaged; but he found no one to take him up, for the simple reason that the bet could not be decided.

After a while, Manitou began to pall a little on the visitors. The great peak had been climbed; Glen Eyrie and the Garden of the Gods visited; Cheyenne and Williams' canons explored. They sighed for new worlds to conquer, and planned a trip to the Grand canon of the Arkansas, and then to Wagon Wheel gap.

He fell into conversation with them, and found a mental tonic in their hearty ways and sensible observations; all unconscious, meanwhile, that the Divinity which shapes our ends would make them casual acquaintances—actors in a drama of real life, in which he himself would have a part, and the "star" would be (how

wildly improbable he would have thought to) the beautiful girl who might be even now on the top of the stage on her way from Del Norte to Alamosa.

When he parted from his new friends, before the train from the north arrived, he left the Mexican village on one side, climbed a little elevation, and, getting therefrom a splendid view of the Spanish peaks, threw himself on the ground, and lay there smoking and surveying the prospects, just as two villainous-looking Mexicans approached the base of the low cliff, and began talking eagerly together.

Suddenly his attention was arrested by what he overheard of the conversation below. Fortunate, indeed was it that he understood Spanish, for the fellows were plotting vengeance against Tom Lewis. He listened eagerly; they spoke vaguely, but finally agreed to obtain certain information and meet again at the same place at 8 o'clock.

An hour later he broke in upon Burke and Harris, sitting in the latter's room. Burke caught the expression on his face in a minute.

"Bet you ten to one, Jack," said he, "before he opens his mouth, that this yere young feller's got something serious to tell us."

"Well, I should say so," said Stanley. He told his story rapidly and concisely. The Mexican scoundrels had, he said, a grudge against Tom Lewis.

"Only throwing his train off the track to-morrow morning," said Stanley. Then he gave all the details of the plan, as discussed in his hearing, and designated the place which they had selected where they would draw the spikes from the rail.

"Sort o' rough on Tom," said Harris, "an' not on him alone. The vice president an' his party will be on that train. The telegram came half an hour ago. You asked me to let you know, an' I was a-goin' to send word to you, out to the ranch. Now we'll just—eh! what's the matter, young feller? Here, drink this."

Stanley had turned deadly pale, and well he might, for in that party was Nellie! He struggled to regain his composure, and a few words sufficed him to make the situation clear to the men. Harris rose, muttering an oath between his teeth.

"Forewarned is forearmed my boy," said he. "There's plenty of time. The night freight eastward is taken off, and there'll be no train over the curve till Tom comes along, an' you bet your life she won't be thrown off the track neither; an' them cussed greasers will wrastle their hash in—well, just wait and see. Don't say a word to a soul, and look sharp now, for we've plenty of work to do."

Jose and Carlos had conceived, as they thought, a very satisfactory plan. The big Americano, strong-armed and loud-voiced, had brought his fate upon himself. Had he not dared to pay attentions to the sweetheart of one caballero, and insult another by laying violent hands upon him? Made de Dios! his blood should atone. And then, what mattered it if ten or twenty Gringos were sent to perdition at the same time? Accidents will happen, and rails will be loosened, in spite of all possible vigilance. No one could be the wiser; and, indeed, if they concealed themselves near the spot, there might be a rare chance for plunder. Yuien sabe? They would be wary and watch their chance. The Gringos sometimes carried plenty of money in the cars; and if the big man with the two revolvers and the belt full of cartridges, who took care of it, should be killed, as he surely must be, they might secure a fortune, cross the mountains by paths known to them, descend, and live rich and happy in Sonora or Chihuahua.

A pretty plan, indeed! So, in the gray of the early morning, before the first rays of the rising sun had bathed the snowy summit of the Sierra Blanca in rose-pink, they climbed the steep and intricate trail. They bungled the weary way with gleeful talk; they indulged in roscate visions of the future; they built grand castles in the air. Why, pious rascals as they were, when their revenge was achieved and their fortunes were made, they might even place a votive offering in some tawdry little adobe chapel on a Mexican hillside. Little did they know that, an hour before, three men had climbed that same path, armed to the teeth; and two of them frontiersmen, faithful and devoted enough to live pieces before their care; and who, too, entrusted the greasers with such a righteous hatred that, in the line of their duty, they would have looked upon the extermination of an entire settlement of them with extreme indifference. Trouble ahead, Senors Jose and Carlos!

When at last they reached the chosen spot, and toiled at the spikes with their rude tools, little, too, did they know that from a hiding place not far distant, these three same men watched their every movement.

Burke, filled with righteous wrath, showed some impatience.

"Say, Jack," whispered he, "what's the use of waitin'? Let's blow the d—d scoundrels' brains out now, and have done with it!" Harris put his hand on his arm.

"Not for the world," said he, with a grim smile. "We'll do as the guards did down at the penitentiary at Canon City last month, when the prisoners had put last night to dig their way through the wall, up a job to give 'em way. They let 'em and enjoy themselves a-working the whole of every night for three weeks, saying that exercise was good for 'em. And then, when they finished the hole and was crawling through, they begged 'em all as they came out an' wished 'em good morning. And blame me if they didn't make 'em go to work an' build the wall up again!"

libal work and descend to enjoy the fruits. Meantime, their task had given them a good appetite for the breakfast of tortillas and frijoles which they had brought with them.

Harris, creeping cautiously through the bush, marked the place they chose. It was some distance to the southward, and high on the hill. Then he returned.

"Well," said Burke, as he approached, blame me, if for pure cussed devilry, that don't just lay over anything I ever see in all my born days."

"It's all right," said Harris, with a smile. "Now, it's our turn. They're just behind that gray rock you see there, near the old pinon. Now we'll go to work and spike that rail again. We can see them if they hear us and come down to find out what's going on. You, my boy—he turned to Stanley—"go down the other way and keep a good lookout; but first lend me a hand with that hammer and bag of spikes."

The young fellow started at once. When he was out of hearing, Harris spoke again.

"It was better to send him off," said he. "We don't need him; and it's fitter work for you and me than for a youngster like him."

The two men examined the caps of their Winchester rifles, placed the weapons against the rock within easy reach, and began their work. Being experts and having proper tools, they made speedy progress.

Meantime, Jose and Carlos finished their breakfast, took each a long pull at a flask of aguardiente, and lighted their pipes. What with unwontedly early rising and novel labor, they were a little drowsy, and only the finishing blows of the heavy hammer, wielded with extra force by Harris' stalwart arms, attracted their attention and aroused them. They stepped from their hiding-place. In an instant Harris saw them.

"Get under cover, quick there, Tom," said he, "so they'll think there is only one man here."

"One, indeed, was all the scoundrels saw as they crept down the slope. They were almost overwhelmed with mingled astonishment and rage. Were their plans thus to miscarry? Never, while they were two to one, and that one did not see them, and their knives were sharp. So on they stealthily crept. They were just on the edge of a steep descent, when they saw their expected victim drop his hammer.

In another second he was erect and facing them; and another man was with him, and both had their rifles to their shoulders, and their fingers on the trigger. "Throw up your hands, you d—d greasers!" shouted Harris. The Mexicans had stopped for a moment, but they had the animal courage of desperadoes, and they whipped out their revolvers. Before they could raise them the two Winchesters cracked as one, and Jose and Carlos fell over the precipice and down hundreds and hundreds of feet. Stanley, hearing the reports, ran to join his companions. Harris briefly explained the situation to him.

"Your head's level, my boy," said he, "and I allow you don't need to be told to keep mighty dark about this thing. Tom and I will see the sheriff this afternoon. Of course, it will come out pretty soon; but it wouldn't do to let the boys know now, for they'd clean out that old outfit of adobe shanties in about five minutes. Now, we'll gather up these things and go down below the curve; and when Tom Lewis comes along, we'll signal him and get on the train."

So they did; Harris and Burke climbed on the engine when the train, after sweeping safely round the curve, came to a stop. Stanley had some difficulty in controlling himself and appearing at his ease as he entered the passenger car; but there came to him a speedy distraction. Pretty Miss Nelly, who had been looking out of the window, turned to see him standing by her, and the least confident of lovers could hardly have mistaken the expression in her eyes.

Stanley took his seat by her. "Did you receive my letter at Alamosa?" he asked.

With heightened color she said: "Yes," then turned and looked out of the window.

He shuddered again, as he sat gazing at her, and thought what might have been her fate but a few moments before. Soon she once more turned to him.

"I don't think much of that Mule-Shoe curve, which you told me was grand and something," she said. "When we es—"

It was dark; she did not notice down just now, I am sure I did not notice anything in particular. But I added, with a pretty blush. "I suppose I was thinking of somebody—I mean, something else."—A. A. Hayes in Belzavilla.

Loveliest Summer Resort on Earth. The loveliest summer resort on earth is probably the plateau of Newera Ella, the "King's Summit," as the natives call it, in the highlands of southern Ceylon. Like the seat of the Olympian gods, it is above all earthly troubles. On "Ceylon's isle," it would be a mistake to suppose with the old hymn that "man alone is vile." In the lowlands there are not only scorpions, lania ticks, venomous snakes, and thirty or forty varieties of mosquitoes, but landleeches, hastening through the grass with a cloth-measure movement—alternate contraction and extension of their anatomy. They introduce themselves in the lower garments of persons trespassing on their native jungles, and extract toll at the rate of an ounce of blood apiece.

But neither leech nor lania ever visits the heights of the King's Summit. An elevation of nearly 6,000 feet so fully insures the plateau against the peril of climatic diseases that the recovery of lowland refugees generally dates from the second day of their arrival. The climate is that of a perpetual May—light showers now and then, but generally cool mornings and sunny afternoons, even in August, when the monsoon clouds brood over the coast plain and vent their electric wrath in thunder-claps resembling the crash of a volcanic explosion.—Dr. Felix L. Oswald.

A Method of Pneumatic Lighting. A new method of lighting, called the pneumatic system, has been described by a Frenchman, M. Bender. He employs the fatty residues obtained from the rectification of crude mineral oils, through which he passes a current of air. The air takes up a definite quantity of this hydrocarbon, and the flame produced is very brilliant, giving off no smoke. Cheapness and immunity from explosions are advantages claimed.—Arkansas Traveler.

The Greek Letter College Societies. Judge Turgoe is getting up a national convention of members of the Greek letter college societies, to be held at Chautauqua in August, "to spread knowledge and promote the favor of Greek letter societies."—Inter Ocean.

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