

A Colorado Experience.

One tempest-tossed night, weather-bound at a small hotel on the stage route from Santa Fe, we met a fellow-traveler in whom we became greatly interested. The howling gale and elemental uproar intensified the cozy cheer of our snug little parlor. The genial warmth from the heated up ruddy coals in the grate, and easy exhalations streamed from an earthen mug brewing in front, out of which from time to time, we replenished our glasses, stimulated conversation, and we were soon launched upon a stream of startling adventure.

Among others, my companion, a finely built, athletic fellow, narrated an experience of the previous season, which he said "made every hair stand on tip-toe." "How?" we asked. "You were in great peril."

"One of those imminent risks that meet you at every turn. Four of us came in the stage from Santa Fe, the last of June, I think. A young lady—governor of an officer's family—her escort, a wealthy merchant, reputable, with a guarantee of honor inscribed on every line of his earnest face, myself, were acquaintances, the other was the horse-shoer of the company, bound for stables at Denver."

"The lady—among the twenties—was so happy in the thought of going East and seeing her widowed mother, was so interested and full of life, that her joy rippled through our conversation like a merry warble.

"You'd like a personal description?" "Well, rather tall and willowy, eyes as black and full of sparkle as a frosty night, and hair commonly called red, but with a glint of gold lines and dashes wherever the sunlight glanced across it.

"I'm sure you are aware of the brigandage for which that route is noted. Marvellous tales are told of the robbers. I suspect the mountain passes of the Appennines hold no more mystery of crime than do the rocky passes of this fresh continent. Constantly facing danger, the pioneer acquires a hardihood that fills him for every fresh encounter of peril however unusual. The periodic robbing of stages has become so much of a fact that the express company will take no more risks, and specie and treasure have to be taken East by private parties.

"As a government expert, I was well known to the bankers of Santa Fe. They never hesitated to entrust me with large amounts of gold, and this time with no exception. So I was loaded, partly by means of an inner belt around my waist, partly by a false bottom, improvised in my valise by gumming wrapping paper over the precious parcels and inner lining of the bag.

"The day would have been intolerable but for the cool currents that swept down the declivities, and through the mountain ravines. Frequently during the day, up the steep ascents, we would get out and walk. It rested us and relieved the tedium of the drive. The lady was most charming, rattling her words like fine shot against our sallies of wit and wisdom, and turning into sport our serious fears. She became confidential, and told us she expected to return a madame, with a military escort—if she returned at all. Her fiancé was a lieutenant, stationed in the Indian Territory; but when he received his furlough—well, very soon, perhaps—then we might expect to hear of wedding bells.

"I would like to be a little richer," she added with a sigh, "but we must take whatever good God gives us, and my treasure happens to be not in gold."

"How much of a dot have you?" said the practical merchant.

"She laughed merrily: "Are you a hand in disguise?" and then added that the fruits of her industry amounted to the heavy weight of one thousand dollars in gold.

"You haven't it with you?" he inquired so quickly and earnestly that I was surprised.

"Come, you are accounted shrewd, just try and find out! I will answer all relevant questioning."

He blushed and stammered an apology, and she sat for a moment on a rock that projected from the side of the road over the mountain edge. She had gathered stray flowers on her walk, diving under bushes and behind rocks, and was fastening them on her hat and mantle. A scarlet creeper ran around the ease of the rock and down the side of the mountain.

girl who, with exhilarating color and sparkling eyes thanked the men most profusely. They cut short her rambles by jumping on the driver's box and telling us to 'pile in.'

Once inside, she said: "As you are all my friends, I must let you into the secret of my hat. All the money I possess is hidden in the lining—quilted in—and no man, not even a highwayman, would ever suspect the treasure hidden in such a cell, now would they?"

We, of course, praised her ingenuity. "A good thousand, is it?" said the merchant.

"The very sum." It was about two o'clock in the morning. We were well into the most formidable passes, driving briskly toward the Canadian fork. The full moon lighted our way, making the bushes and trees cast sharp, decided shadows across the road. I had exchanged places with the shoer. Inside they were dozing, but I was wakeful and alert. We leguiled the weary hour by story telling. Suddenly I saw something moving in the shadow of the road beyond us.

"What is that?" I said. The driver looked, his eyes rounding like the moon.

"Nothing but a burro," referring to the pack mules that frequently strayed down the mountain side. They were hidden in huge slonched sombreros and army cloaks. The stoutest caught the bridle of the leaders, the other, covering us with his rifle, shouted:

"Don't stir, or you are dead men." Advancing closer, and keeping us within the range of his muzzle, he cried out:

"Pitch out the treasure box quick, we are in a hurry!" The driver began to stammer a reply, shaking as if he had an ague stroke, but I hushed him with a whispered:

"Stop, stop! let me talk to these men! There is no treasure aboard to-night!" I said this coolly, swaying my body to and fro, backwards and forwards, to get out of the range of the muzzle. The man was evidently very nervous, as well as very near.

As I intended he should, he took me for an express messenger, and as neither driver nor messenger are supposed to possess any valuables, they are seldom molested.

"None of your nonsense," replied the bandit. "Hand out the treasure or you will see trouble."

The man at the reins evidently enjoyed my endeavor to get out of range, for he squeaked in a high falsetto voice:

"Do them bar's look big?" "Yes, I said, echoing the old joke current among the miners. "Yes, I can read all the advertisements in the wading."

He chuckled a rough chuckle. "Come, come, heave out that specie box," shouted the man holding the rifle.

I insisted there was none. "Here, look at the waybill; if there is any such thing aboard it will be among the items, and I made a move to get down, holding it in my hand.

"Stay where you are, or I'll shoot you on the spot!" I threw him the waybill. He picked it up, perusing the items in the moonlight. Profiting by this action I undertook to slip my portmoune in my pocket. The driver misunderstanding the movement, whispered:

take whatever is sent us. We have no treasure, but this will do. Drive on?" "I want the waybill," I said excitedly, for the scene we had just witnessed had increased my indignation to a fever heat.

He handed it to me, but it fluttered under the horses' feet, and again I demanded it. Mechanically he picked it up, mounted the wheel and handed it to me. Then touching his hat to the lady, said:

"But for this lining you might have been lying in yonder ditch. No treasure on board! Come this way next time without it, and we'll finish your accounts. Drive on."

We gladly followed this advice, but could not find language vigorous enough to express our contempt for the meanness of the merchant. The driver swore at him in Spanish, and the young lady answered all attempts at consolation with hysterical sobs. The merchant alone preserved his equanimity of temper.

Arriving at Denver, he begged very earnestly of the young lady, with me as her friend, to grant him a few moments for explanation, in a private parlor. He was so earnest that the young girl yielded a reluctant consent.

He closed the door and bolted it, which looked very strangely. "Don't fear," he said, as I fumbled for my revolver.

Sitting in a chair, he pulled off his boot, and from the toe drew out a roll of greenbacks. Said he: "A few days before leaving I was lucky enough to find an opportunity to exchange my doubloons for these. My poor child, let me make restitution. Here are two thousand in bills for the one thousand secured by the robbers"—handing her that amount. "Your lining was a Godsend to me. If they had searched me they would have secured twenty thousand instead of one thousand dollars. Concealed in my baggage were diamonds and precious stones which, if they had secured, would have beggared me."

Taking a solitaire from his vest lining he presented that also for her acceptance, and continued:

"I should have explained in the stage, but walls have ears, and why should I trust the others with my secrets?" Of course, as it turned out, I was highly pleased at the sagacity of the gentleman—the more so as I recollected the responsibility of specie I, too, had assumed.

I need not tell you that the lady's tears were transmuted into rare smiles, and she went home rejoicing.

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