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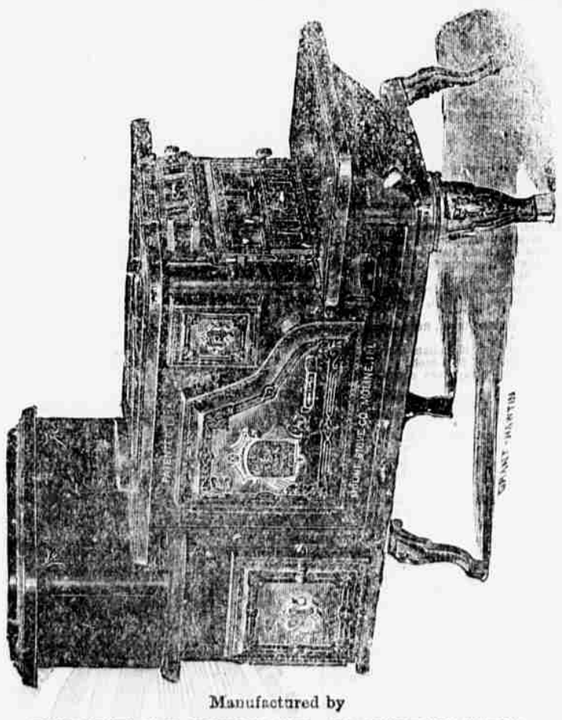
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ADOWN THE HUERFANO.

A NOVEL ADVENTURE.

We were camped on the Huerfano river, near the site of the now famous Pocahontas silver mine, which was then an unknown treasure house.

Our party numbered ten, all told, including my brother Albert, an expert naturalist and geologist, as well as several other gentlemen of like attainments, who were devoting their time to the study of the great canyons and giant domes of Colorado.

My brother was a delicate-looking fellow, who loved nothing half so well as the study of rocks, while I, exulting in flesh and muscle, and considerably younger, looked more of a man than he.

No unusual excitement had disturbed our progress, saving an occasional bear chase, or a spirited fight with a mountain cat. We had been remarkably fortunate in not running across hostile Indians, and with less than usual caution, therefore, we were on our way east.

The winter was well advanced, and the ground covered with a fall of snow, on which there was a solid crust.

Albert and I started out in the the morning, he to examine a canyon some two or three miles up the river, while I, with my rifle, proposed to shoot any kind of game which came in my way.

About a mile out of camp we separated, I taking Toby Trickett, a half-grown lad, with me. Toby was full of odd kind of fun, which often made the way a merry one. He was also a confirmed tobacco chewer, the quantities of which he used was something marvelous.

We traveled a long way without meeting any food for powder.

"Jerico and Jewsharps!" exclaimed Toby, as he loaded his mouth with a stock of blackleg, "ef this yere ain't disgustin." We hain't seen nothin' to blaze at. I heven't had a chance to drar a bead on a bumble-buzzer. Let's git to camp, for I say, shoot this here kantin' business."

"I don't fancy going back to camp without either fur or feather," I replied.

"If you take back your own hair, young men, you may be glad," interrupted a new voice.

I turned to glance at the speaker, who advanced towards us from the thicket. He was certainly the handsomest being I ever saw in the shape of scout or woodsman. Fully six feet tall, of elegant shape, an open, frank countenance, and clustering locks of a warm rich brown, he seemed to be the very incarnation of manly beauty.

His dress, too, was noticeable from its fine material and adornments. His jacket was of a dark blue, buttoned closely over his breast, with a triple row of silver buttons. Fringed pantaloons of buckskin encased his limbs, and a sash of bright scarlet, in which were both pistol and hunting-knife. Upon his head a sombrero was placed, and in his hand was a rifle, evidently one of the best.

"Why, what's oin' gen?" asked Toby, I being rather startled by the unexpected advent of the scout. 'Is the blazin' blood-drinkers scootin' 'bout these diggin's?'

The stranger turned upon Toby a glance of sternness, and then said to me:

"There's a band of Sioux in this valley. They have just captured a white man, up the canyon, and sent him back to their camp for torture."

"What was he like?" I eagerly asked; while Toby demanded:

"Was he sockdolergist, noseing mong rocks?"

"Yes; he was pounding one of the rocks with his hammer when the savages stole upon him."

"It is Albert my brother! I must go to his rescue at once!"

"I'm goin' to make a bee-line home, you bet!" whimpered the fearful Toby.

"Yes, and be captured, too, with the trail you leave."

"I ain't makin' no trail."

The scout pointed some rods away to a dark stain on the snow, produced by one of Toby's expectorations.

"You say there's Injuns about?" tremulously asked Toby.

He received a grave, confirmatory nod from the scout; and Toby, kicking off pare of the snow-crust where he was standing, discharged his mouthful of tobacco, and then carefully replaced the curust, with an exclamation of satisfaction.

"Where are you going?" asked the scout, as Toby started off at a brisk pace.

"Jericho and jewsharps! I ain't got no notion o' furnishin' ornyminta for an Injun belt, so I'll scoot for camp."

"Then scoot!" shouted the scout angrily, bestowing a hearty kick. "Scoot, then, you coward!"

It was apparent that Toby was disposed to obey the admonition "to scoot," so impressively emphasized, and in a few moments we were left alone.

"Now," said the scout, who it was plainly to be seen was a man of more than ordinary intelligence, "you and I are going to take your brother and slide right out of their camp."

Accordingly we took up our march toward the Indian camp, where he informed me my brother had been sent by the warriors.

"You see," he concluded, "there cannot be more than three or four Indians about, and they are the least experienced of the band. The braves are on the war path and will not return until evening. If we are to rescue him, it must be now."

After a long and fatiguing climb, we stood on the top of one of the minor ridges of the mountains. Towering around us on every side were the tall cliffs of the mountains, their majestic peaks standing out clear and bold in the biting winter atmosphere. Below us lay the dark thread of the Huerfano river, locked in the icy embrace of a Colorado winter.

Leading down to the brink from where we stood was a sheer descent, almost entirely unbroken by tree or bowlder. We were looking upon one of those mysterious phenomena known as a "weird shoot," which nature has cleared either by fire or tornado.

The shoot was about sixty feet wide, and, with the exception of a few jagged rocks, afforded a clear roadway from top to bottom. It was now covered with a glistening bed of frozen snow, utterly impassable to man or even the sure footed deer.

It was no time, however, to study this ice-slide, when my dearly loved brother was a captive in the hands of remorseless red demons.

We were within a few rods of the camp, and thither we cautiously directed our way through a thicket of scrub oak.

"Ah," whispered the scout to me, as he pointed to an article standing against a tree known as a "toboggan," "the red fiends have been enjoying sleighrides, I see!"

Still more silently we moved toward the camp until we caught sight of Albert standing bound to an immense tree, just in front of us.

Around the fire a considerable distance beyond the prisoner were the bucks, lazily reclining on their blankets watching several squaws preparing a meal.

The scout motioned me to remain where I was, while he began to creep toward Albert. This he succeeded in doing, under the cover of the scrub oak which fringed the whole camp.

Never in my life did I spend such an interminable five minutes. My eye was fixed upon the savages, and my rifle at full-cock, ready to fire should an alarm be given.

It seemed to me that the scout must have easily traversed the distance half a dozen times. So long was it, in fact, that I began to fear some accident had befallen him.

I turned my eyes to see what was occassioning the delay. To my amazement Albert was no longer bound.

At that instant, my heart leaped into my throat as I heard the savage yell which announced the discovery of the loss of their prisoner.

The scout and my brother were at my side.

Horror thrilled our bosoms as we heard other shouts and louder ones, which rang and rang again through the snow-clad fastneses.

We turned to see the meaning of this increase of sound

"Merciful heavens! The whole band have come back!" exclaimed my brother.

"We are lost!" shouted I, in a frenzy of excitement, as I saw the savages entering the other side of the village, and, led by the surprised watchers, started in pursuit.

It had been possible to escape from from three or four ordinary braves, but to evade a hundred or more of the best and most experienced red woodsmen, that was impossible!

"We are lost!" therefore I again said.

"Not so," responded the scout. "We have one chance in a hundred. I'll take that chance!"

So saying, he darted aside from the trail and seized the toboggan.

"To the shoot! to the shoot!" he exclaimed.

Meanwhile the bullets were clipping the branches about us on either side, and the air was cleft with blood-curdling yells—such yells as only issue from demon throats.

They were gaining rapidly upon us, one hideous stalwart especially naar, while but a short space behind were three or four others.

It was doubtful if we could gain the shoot in time, but, straining every nerve, we reached it, with the foremost Indian not far distant.

Luckily for us, he had discharged his rifle early in the chase, and must depend upon his knife or clubbed weapon.

As the scout threw down the toboggan he shouted:

"Give that head chap a dose! Don't waste your metal, else it will go hard with us!"

He had placed his rifle in the hands of Albert, and was arranging the toboggan—which, I must explain, is a smooth board, about eight feet long, with the end turned up in front like the dashboard of a sleigh. This is held in position by thongs and posts set in the board. A toboggan of this length affords a seat for four people.

Ordinarily, not one of us would have thought of using the shoot, for to descend that fearful declivity seemed certain death.

Now, the thought of the risk was not so appalling, with the alternative of cruel torture and ignominous death behind us.

I stood a second only with my rifle poised. My muscle grew tense with thought that I must kill. I pressed my hand on the trigger, the hammer fell.

But there was no report! The chief rushed upon me with his gleaming knife brandished above. In a second more, the glittering steel dropped from his hand, and with a groan he fell to the ground.

Albert had performed the work in which I had failed.

But a few feet behind the gory body were two savages to take his place.

"Get on! get on!" exclaimed the scout, as he set the example.

In second we were seated on the craft, and it begin to move gently forward.

The two braves were at the brink, and one had his hand upon my shoulder.

The quick wrench I gave precipitated the toboggan forward, and we began to move faster. A couple of shots rang through the startled air, one of them striking the rear end of the now swiftly moving sled.

We dared not to look behind, but we heard the cries of the foiled savages, as all breathless they gathered at the brink and hurled volleys of balls and yells of rage after us.

The speed with which we were descending the mountain side was momentarily increasing.

The toboggan, with its glassy surface, was flying over the icy path.

The forest trees on either side appeared to be rushing madly upward, while we seemed to stand still. So rapid was our flight that the heavy garments we wore were like sleeves through which red hot needles were thrust into our cold flesh.

On and on, faster and faster, like the whirlwind, like the mountain tornado, we sped. Behind the snorting iron-horse we had never gone so fast.

It was with difficulty we could breathe. The circulation of our blood ceased, and our hearts throbbed like the pulsations of a steam engine.

The pace was terrific—it was maddening. When we could think we pictured ourselves dashed against the rock, our mangled bodies tossing down upon the black depths below.

About two-thirds of the way down was a jagged rock, against which our frail bark was wildly speeding. The throbbing in my heart stood still. I closed my eyes in terror, but the horrible fascination of that certain death was upon me. I did not dare to keep them closed.

Just before we reached the rock the scout struck the snowy crust with the butt of his rifle, and the toboggan swerved safely around the obstacle. The impetus of our motion tore the weapon out of his grasp, and it went spinning down the incline.

At last we had reached the foot of the descent, and were gliding, at a greatly reduced speed, upon the frozen surface of the Huerfano.

We were safe!

Oftimes I lie awake at night, hearing the whistle of the winter's wind, but its shrilling blast seems as a whisper compared with the wild shrieking which sounded in my ears as I rode down the "shoot" on the Huerfano river.

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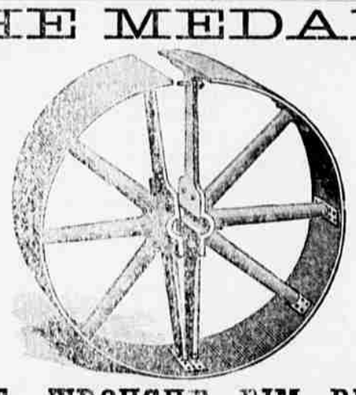
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